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Paddy, the Irish lad, sprang forward. The next instant he was engaged in a hand-to-hand conflict with the intruder.

POOR PADDY;

OR,

The Adventures of a Wild Irish Boy.

By FRED THORPE.

CHAPTER I.

Paddy Arrives.

"Sure, where am I at all, at all?"

A picture of hopeless bewilderment was the lad who uttered these words.

He was a well-built, not ill-looking Irish boy of perhaps fifteen or sixteen, who had just left Castle Garden and ventured out for the first time into the great city of New York.

As a rule none of the many emigrants who daily land at the great Metropolis of the New World are so utterly helpless as those from Erin's Isle.

They are the easiest victims of the many sharpers who infest such localities.

The dark-eyed, wily Italian; the quick-witted, suspicious Frenchman; the phlegmatic German; the consequential and self-satisfied Englishman; the canny Scot—all are fairly well able to take care of themselves.

But poor, helpless Paddy is often an easy victim of the wiles of the deceiver.

Not that he lacks shrewdness, but he is good-natured and confiding, believes that every one means just what he says, is unacquainted with the ways of the country and its inhabitants, and takes longer to learn them than many others.

Of course there are many exceptions to this rule, but nevertheless it is the rule.

And a better example of it was never seen than the youth with whose words our story begins.

Clad in a corduroy suit with knee-breeches, brogans on his feet, a small green cap stuck on his head, a bundle of clothing fastened to the end of the stout stick that was slung over his shoulder, he was a perfect picture of the Irish emigrant, long ago made famous in song and story.

"Stag the Mick!" shouted one of a group of newsboys and bootblacks, and instantly the attention of the whole "gang" was directed to the stranger.

The Irish boy's wonder and bewilderment at the sights that surrounded him were both ludicrous and pathetic, but the gamins only saw the funny side, and commenced to "guy" him at once.

"Hello, Paddy!" shouted one of them.

The lad turned sharply.

"How did ye know my name?"

"Don't yer remember me?" grinned the bootblack, approaching the young emigrant, and eyeing him from head to foot.

"I do not."

"Why, we used to know each other in the old country, Paddy."

"In the ould country?"

"Sure. In Kilkenny."

"But it's not from Kilkenny I am. Sure, I'm from Roscommon."

"I meant to say Roscommon."

"I've no remembrance o' ye at all, at all."

"Yer haven't?"

"I have not."

"Well, yer see I knew you. How's all the folks, anyhow?"

"Sure, they're well enough, but Father Hogan's cow died last month."

This elicited a burst of laughter from the crowd.

"So Father Hogan's cow is dead, is she?"

"She is."

And Paddy stared at his interlocutors, wondering what they were all laughing at.

"How's der Widder O'Reilly?" asked another of the crowd, winking at his companions.

As luck would have it there was a Widow O'Reilly in the emigrant's village, so he replied:

"Sure, she's doin' well, an' they say she's goin' ter marry Mike Finnegan, the blacksmith."

"Is that so?"

"It is. An' are you from Roscommon, too?"

And Paddy's face assumed an expression of the utmost perplexity.

"I am," replied the young "hoodlum," imitating the Irish boy's accent.

"Sure, I t'ought I knew ivery man, woman an' child in the county, but I have no remembrance o' you, aither."

"Haven't yer? I remember you well enough."

"Ye do?"

"Sure. But what yer got in that there grip o' yourn?"

And the "mud-lark" made a reach for the bundle, done up in a big red handkerchief, at the end of Paddy's stick.

The son of Erin was quick enough for him, however.

Wheeling around swiftly, an expression of anger taking the place of the good-natured look upon his face, he shouted:

"That'll do now! Niver moind about that! What consarn is it o' yours?"

If the gang—which by this time had largely increased—had roared with laughter before they shrieked now.

"Bully fer you, Irish!"

"I bet on der Mick!"

"He ain't takin' no funny talk!"

"Betcher he'll be an alderman in a mont'!"

These were a few of the comments made by the Irish boy's tormentors.

Paddy did not fully comprehend their meaning, but he held on to his bundle with a grip of iron, while a suspicious look appeared upon his face.

He was beginning to see that he was being laughed at.

"I want nothin' more to say to yez," he remarked shortly, as he turned to walk away.

"Yer don't, eh?" said the first one of his companions, placing himself in the emigrant's way.

"No, I don't."

"But I want somet'in' ter say ter you."

"Ye do?"

"Yes."

"An' what is it?"

"I have an aunt in County Roscommon."

"Ye have?"

"Yep."

"An' what's her name?"

"Bridget O'Flaherty."

"I don't know her."

"Oh, yes, yer do, Paddy. She wrote me dat yer'd be here ter-day, an' she said she'd send me an elegant present by yer. I believe yer've got it in dat handkerchief; let's see now."

And he made another effort to seize the emigrant's bundle.

Paddy turned quickly, but as he did so another of the young rascals grasped the bundle.

"I've got it, Jakey; now we'll see what's inter it."

Paddy attempted to regain possession of his belongings, but the gang surrounded him and kept him back, while one of their number prepared to untie the handkerchief.

The knot with which it was fastened was a tough one, and resisted all their efforts.

"I can't untie it," growled one of the young "toughs." "Say, Hank, lend me yer knife an' I'll cut it."

At this Paddy naturally became a good deal excited.

"Cut that an' I'll make ye sorry for it—begorra I will!" he shouted.

And he made vain efforts to get at the boys who had possession of his bundle.

But two others of the number held him back.

To tell the truth, they had all that they could do, for the Irish lad was a stout young fellow, and was straining every muscle.

The boy who had been addressed as Hank handed over his knife, saying with a coarse laugh:

"Dere yer are. Rip it open, an' let's see wot der Mick has got."

Suddenly Paddy broke away from the two fellows who held him.

The next moment he had given one of them a blow in the right eye which closed that useful organ at once and sent its owner reeling over backward.

In an instant confusion reigned.

The young rough who had been hit sprang up and rushed toward Paddy, who was still in the clutches of the other fellow.

The boy who held the bundle dropped it, and with the others crowded around Paddy and their comrade with the black eye.

"Go fer him, Johnny!"

"Knock der life out o' him!"

These, and other similar exclamations, showed that the young emigrant had no reason to expect any very friendly treatment from those who surrounded him.

"Hold on!" shouted one. "Give de Mick a show. Form a ring, an' let Johnny knock him out accordin' ter Markis o' Queensbury's rules."

There is almost always a spirit of fairness in an American crowd, and that it was inherent in this one was evident from the quick way in which the suggestion was adopted.

Paddy watched the arrangements in bewilderment.

It did not take long to complete them.

Then the lad who had been addressed as Hank said:

"Now, den, if yous is ready let 'er go."

The fellow who held Paddy released him and pushed him into the ring, where his opponent stood awaiting him.

The Irish lad knew nothing about the Marquis of Queensbury or his rules, but he did know

that he had been treated in a grossly inhospitable manner, and he was eager to avenge himself.

While he was not, like the traditional and proverbial Irishman, "spoiling for a fight," he was more than willing to engage in one under the circumstances.

So, without regard for the usual conventionalities—which he knew nothing about—he made a rush for his late assailant, a sudden, savage rush against which it was impossible for the rough to stand up.

The next moment the fellow's other eye was closed as tightly as the first one, and Paddy was exclaiming:

"Begorra, av ye had another I'd shut that for ye, too."

CHAPTER II.

Paddy Finds Two Friends.

A shout of rage went up from the crowd, a shout that could have been heard a block distant.

"Johnny" had to be helped to his feet and led to a hydrant near by.

"Go fer him, fellers."

"Lick der socks off o' him!"

"Sock it ter him!"

Those and other like adjurations showed that the crowd's blood was up.

They were determined to avenge the imagined wrongs of their comrade, and it seemed extremely probable that Paddy would have a hard time of it.

He had no reason to expect any mercy at the hands of his assailants.

Three or four of them seized him at once.

He was, of course, powerless to defend himself against a force so superior.

"Four to wan is not fair play," he shouted. "Give me a chance an' I'll t'rash ye all, wan at a toime."

But they paid no attention to him.

It would certainly have gone hard with poor Paddy had not an unexpected interruption occurred.

"Stop! You cowards!" shouted a clear, strong voice.

The entire crowd turned and gazed in the direction from which it proceeded.

The speaker was a tall, handsome, well-dressed boy of about Paddy's age.

With clinched fists and flashing eyes he pushed his way to the centre of the crowd and took his place by the side of the emigrant.

So astonished were the fellows who held the Irish boy that they released their hold on him almost involuntarily.

But as he grasped Paddy's arm and attempted

to push his way through the crowd his progress was barred.

"Hold on dere, Freshy!"

The speaker was Hank, the bootblack.

"Get out of my way!" ordered the newcomer.

"Who—me?" sneered the bootblack.

"Yes."

"Nixey."

"You won't?"

"Naw!"

"Then take that!"

"That" was a blow from the boy's fist, given with almost as much force as those dealt by Paddy a few moments before, and Hank dropped like a log.

The next moment two others of the toughs fell, one from a second blow from the new arrival and the other on account of a sudden collision of his nose and Paddy's fist.

But the two boys could not have long resisted the combined onslaughts of the now infuriated gang of hoodlums had it not been for the fortunate appearance on the scene of a policeman.

"Cheese it! A cop!"

As this familiar cry rang out on the air the crowd scattered in all directions, leaving Paddy and his new-found friend standing alone together.

The policeman "bore down" on them, shouting:

"Now thin, now thin, f'what's all this?"

The newcomer turned to him, asking, with a smile:

"Don't you know me, McCafferty?"

The policeman started.

"By the powers! it's Masther Ralph!"

"That's who it is."

"An' what are ye doin' down here?"

"Oh, just taking a walk."

"A walk, is it?"

"Yes."

"An' you got inter a fight!"

The policeman uttered these words almost reproachfully.

The boy laughed.

"Oh, no, I didn't."

"You didn't?"

"Of course not."

"Well, I t'ought it wudn't be loike ye, Masther Ralph. But——"

"But how came I with a gang like that?—is that what you were about to say, McCafferty?"

"Yis."

"Well, I just stopped long enough to rescue this boy from that tough crowd that you cleared away."

For the first time the policeman's eyes rested upon the emigrant's face.

"It's Irish ye are!" he exclaimed.

Paddy stared at him a moment.

Then he said:

"I am Irish, an' I'm not ashamed of it."

"F'why shud ye be?" went on the guardian of

the peace. "From fwhat part of Ireland are ye?"

"Why do ye ask?" inquired the boy suspiciously.

"I have me raisons."

"Thin," replied Paddy firmly, "I have mine for not answerin' ye."

"What raisons kin ye have?" almost shouted the officer, feeling that his dignity had been insulted.

"That's my business," said the emigrant; "moind yer own, an' I'll thry to attind to mine."

Officer McCafferty swung his club in belligerent style, and was about to descend upon the new importation like a cyclone when the boy who had been addressed as Ralph interposed with:

"Wait a minute, McCafferty!"

"What fer, Masther Ralph?"

And the officer paused with his club elevated in the air and his eyes fixed upon the lad's face.

"Because the boy is right."

The policeman bent a look of astonishment upon the speaker.

"He is roight, ye say?"

"Of course."

"But——"

"McCafferty!" interrupted Ralph, laying his hand upon the officer's shoulder.

"Well?"

"Do you remember when you first came to this country?"

A grin appeared upon McCafferty's Celtic features.

"Begorra, I do."

"You remember how green you were, don't you?"

"Indade, I do; but——"

"But," interrupted Ralph again, "that was, as you were about to say, a good while ago."

"It was."

"But still you were very green?"

"Thru for ye, Masther Ralph."

"You expected to meet wild Indians on the streets?"

"I did."

And McCafferty broke into a hearty fit of laughter.

"But you are over all that now."

"Sure, I am. A'n't I wan o' the methropolitan police?"

And he swelled out his chest and glared for a moment at poor Paddy, who had listened to this dialogue with wide-open mouth.

Ralph laughed.

"You are—thanks to your cousin, the alderman. But, for all that, you don't own the city, McCafferty."

"Well, I own a part of it, annyhow," he said, with a broad grin.

"So you do," returned Ralph, laughing; "but you didn't own much when you first came, and you hadn't been in the city an hour before you

were cheated out of the few pounds you had in your pocket when you landed."

McCafferty looked rather sheepish.

"Thru for ye, Masther Ralph," he said; "but, begorra, I'm always on the lookout for the spalpeen that blarneyed me out o' thim same four pounds, an' fwhin I find him I'll——"

"You'll run him in, I suppose?"

"Run him in, is it? Bedad, I'll run him off the face o' the earth."

"Well, you see, you ought not to have blamed this boy, Paddy, here, for not answering your questions; if you had been as careful yourself on the day you landed you would not have lost your four pounds."

"Begorra, ye're right, Masther Ralph!" exclaimed the officer, who seemed a good deal struck by this idea.

"Of course I am. Now, I can tell you all you need to know about this lad."

"Ye can?"

"Yes. I overheard him say that he was from the County Roscommon."

"That's no lie," interrupted Paddy.

"From County Roscommon, is he?" said the officer, with a look of new interest.

"It is," replied Paddy.

"Sure I'm from there mesilf," exclaimed McCafferty.

"Do ye tell me so?"

"I do. An' from what parish worr ye?"

"From Ballyslathery."

"From Ballyslathery! I'm from there mesilf. An' what's this yer name is?"

"Pathrick Hogan."

"By the powers! I t'ought so!"

And Officer McCafferty impulsively folded the emigrant in his arms.

CHAPTER III.

Ralph Has an Idea.

Ralph stared at the couple astounded; and Paddy was evidently scarcely less surprised.

"Arrah, be aisy now!" he shouted, struggling to free himself from the policeman's embrace.

McCafferty released him and held him at arm's length.

"Begorra," he said, "ye look as much loike yer mother as two peas looks like each other, so ye do!"

"My mother, is it?" said Paddy, excitedly. "An' did ye know my mother?"

"I did. She is the Widder Hogan o' Ballyslathery, is she not?"

"Yis, she was."

"Was?"

And the officer lifted his brows interrogatively.

"Yis. Sure, she's dead, Hiven rist her sow!"
 "Wirra, wirra!" exclaimed McCafferty. "An' is she dead?"

"She is."

And Paddy wiped away an unbidden tear.

"How long has she been dead?"

"Two years."

"An' yer father died five or six years before her?"

"Yis."

"So ye're an orphan, Paddy?"

"I am that, an' a stranger in a strange land."

And Paddy sighed heavily.

"Have ye no place to go?"

"I have not, but I shuppose I can find wan."

"Sure, I'd take ye home mesilf if I had a place for ye, but there's scarce room for the wife an' the childher now."

Here Ralph interposed.

"I have an idea! I think I can find a place for Paddy."

"Ye do, Masther Ralph?"

"Yes."

"Hiven bless ye if ye can!" interrupted Paddy fervently.

"I can't promise positively," went on Ralph, "but I shall do my best. McCafferty, you remember the place you held in our house when you first came to this country?"

"Yis. Ah, that was fwihin yer poor father was aloive, Masther Ralph."

"Yes. You attended to the furnaces and all that sort of thing."

"I did; an' it's moighty grane I was at first, too, sorr."

And McCafferty grinned broadly at the recollection.

"But it did not take you long to learn; and when your cousin got you an appointment as policeman, and you left us, we were all sorry enough—you know that."

"Begorra, I do; an' ye worr not sorrier nor I was."

"I believe it. Well, McCafferty, how do you think Paddy here would do for the place?"

"Sure, I don't see fwwhy he wudn't do, Masther Ralph—that is, if yer new father wud have patience wid him."

Ralph's brow darkened, as if these words suggested some unpleasant thought.

"I hope he would, McCafferty," he said.

"Sure, Masther Ralph," said the policeman, looking the boy shrewdly in the face, "this Major Buckley is no such a man as your own father was."

"Indeed, he is not," said Ralph, earnestly.

"I wondher that as foine a lady as your good mother could iver have married the loikes o' him."

"This is neither the time nor the place to discuss that question," said Ralph, frowning slightly. "In fact, there is no use of discussing it at all."

"Don't be angry, Masther Ralph," said McCafferty.

"I'm not angry."

"Thin let me ax ye wan more question?"

"Go on."

"How de ye get along with yer new father?"

Ralph hesitated a moment.

Then he said:

"Not very well."

"I was afraid not, sorr. That Major Buckley is not a man that anny wan could get along aisy with. But let me tell ye wan t'ing—if ye iver have anny throuble, remimber that ye have a frind on the police force—an' that's me, Dinnis McCafferty."

Ralph smiled.

"I know that well, McCafferty. But I must be going now. Come along, Paddy."

"An' begorra here comes the roundsman! Good-day and good luck to ye both."

And he walked away, swinging his club, while Ralph and Paddy started in the direction of the elevated railroad.

Ralph had noticed that the emigrant had been made quite nervous by the passing trains, and he now observed that Paddy's apprehension increased.

As he started up the stairs that led to the elevated road, the Irishman grasped his arm.

"Hould on, Masther Ralph! Where are ye goin'?"

"To take the train, of course," replied the boy.

"Wan o' thim up there?"

"Certainly."

"Begorra, it's afeard I am."

"Afraid of what?" laughed Ralph.

"I niver see cars like thim before."

"Oh, you'll see a good deal of them before you leave New York."

"Av ye plaze, sorr, I'd rather walk."

"Nonsense!" said Ralph, assuming a more authoritative tone. "Come along—you won't be hurt."

Paddy said no more, but followed his new friend in evident fear and trembling.

Throughout the ride, which lasted nearly half an hour, he sat on the extreme edge of the seat, holding onto it with both hands; and when, in obedience to the gesture from Ralph, he at last arose and left the car he uttered a deep sigh of relief.

"Well, you see you still live," smiled Ralph, when they again reached the street.

"The saints be praised, I do!" returned the lad.

"Oh, you'll get used to the elevated road in time."

"I hope so."

"Of course you will."

"But, Masther Ralph, is this still New York?"

"Oh, yes."

"Begorra, it's a big place."

"Larger than you thought, eh?"

"It is that. Ballyslathery's nothin' to it. An' is San Francisco near here? I have a friend livin' there."

"It's something like three thousand miles, Paddy."

"Tree t'ousan'—say, Masther Ralph, it's jokin' wid me ye are."

"Oh, no, I'm not."

"Thin, by the powers, this is the big counthry. But, Masther Ralph, I don't see anny goold."

"Any what?"

"Goold."

"Oh, gold!"

"Yis. I was tould I wud foind it layin' in the sthrates."

Ralph laughed heartily, and explained to Paddy that the only way to find gold in the New World was to work for it, and work hard.

"Well, I'm willin' to do that," said the emigrant, resolutely. "An' ye say, Masther Ralph, that McCafferty was wanst as grane as me?"

"Oh, yes."

"An' now see what illigant clothes he does be wearin'."

"Well, perhaps you will sport a uniform some day. But here we are at the house."

And he began ascending the steps of a four-story brown-stone mansion on a fashionable street east of Fifth Avenue.

"An' is this where ye live, sorr?" asked Patsy, surveying the building with a look of awe.

"It is."

"Begorra, it's an illegant place. Sure, it's bigger nor Squire O'Brien's, an' that's wan o' the biggest houses in County Roscommon."

As Ralph was about to unlock the front door it suddenly opened, and a young man of perhaps twenty or twenty-one rushed out.

His face was flushed and he seemed a good deal excited.

As he passed he nodded shortly to Ralph, who returned the salutation coldly.

"Come in, Paddy," said the boy, "and I will speak to my mother at once."

The two lads entered the house.

CHAPTER IV.

Paddy Gets a Job.

We will precede the two lads into the mansion.

While they were riding up-town on the elevated road a somewhat exciting interview was taking place in the library of the dwelling.

At about the time that Ralph and Paddy left the policeman, Dennis McCafferty, a prolonged ring had sounded through the house, and Major

Horace Buckley, who had been writing at his desk, sprang up with an impatient exclamation:

"I'll wager a thousand that that's Hector, confound him!"

A moment later the door was burst open, and a rather handsome but dissipated-looking young man entered.

Flinging himself into a chair, he asked:

"Well, governor, how are you?"

"None the better for seeing you, I can assure you of that," was the reply as the major began pacing the apartment.

Father and son looked remarkably alike.

There were resemblances in their features which a skilled physiognomist would have detected more quickly than an ordinary observer—for instance, a certain look about the mouth and eyes which gave plain evidence of a treacherous, insincere nature in each.

Hector Buckley laughed shortly at his father's response to his salutation.

"So you're not glad to see me, eh?"

"Why should I be?"

"Why shouldn't you be?"

"Because bills to the amount of about one hundred and fifty dollars, contracted by you, have been presented to me for payment since this time yesterday."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"And because I know that the object of your present visit can only be to demand more money."

"Well, you're right, governor; I'm broke."

"Broke?"

"Hard up—stranded—strapped."

"Where is the check I gave you last Tuesday?"

"Gone."

"At the gaming-table, I suppose."

"What a talent you have for guessing, governor."

"Humph! Well, I'll tell you one thing right now—you'll get no more money from me."

"I shan't, eh?"

"No—for the simple reason that I have none to give you. All I possess I need for my personal uses."

"But, confound it, gov, you can get all you want by applying to your wife, my respected step-mother."

"No, I can't."

And Major Buckley uttered a fierce oath.

"Aha! she's cut off the supplies, has she?"

"Yes."

Hector Buckley laughed heartily.

"Well, you've made a pretty mess of this business, governor!"

"What do you mean?"

"What I say, as I generally do. You married the wealthy widow of your old friend, Redmund Earl, expecting to live in clover on her money the rest of your life. But you got badly left."

"Silence, sir!"

"She has refused to make a will in your favor——"

"Simply because she fancies that that long-lost sister of hers, to whom she maintains that the property belongs, may turn up some day. But I shall overrule that objection, Hector—trust me for that."

"Perhaps you will, but I don't believe it. These mild, soft-spoken people, like this second wife of yours, often have wills of iron."

"Bah!"

"Well, it certainly looks as if she had gotten you pretty well under her thumb if you can't get her to fork over a fifty or so for me."

"If you want fifty dollars go and earn it."

"Ha, ha, ha! Good advice, governor; but why didn't you do the same instead of marrying a rich widow?"

"See here, Hector," began the old man in a rage.

"Now, don't get excited," interposed his son. "I'm not blaming you; I'd have done the same myself; only I don't want to be preached to. Now, see here, dad, I'm in a hole, and that's a fact."

"Faro?"

"No, poker; if I don't pay up I shall be disgraced."

"Well, can't you raise a paltry fifty without coming to me?"

"Governor, I've got to be perfectly frank with you; it's a good deal more than fifty."

"I suspected so. How much is it?"

"A cool two thousand."

"Two thousand! Then you'll have to look elsewhere for it."

"But——"

"It's no use—I haven't got it."

"But your wife has. I dare say she has twice the amount locked up in that desk of hers."

"Very likely she has; but I can't get it."

"Take it."

"Not to pay your gambling debts with. No, Hector, you'll not get a penny from me—not a penny—so make up your mind to that."

It was evident that Major Buckley meant what he said.

"That is your resolution, is it?" cried his son fiercely.

"It is."

"And you're willing that I should suffer in order that that young cub, Ralph Earl, your stepson, should be enriched?"

"You are talking nonsense, Hector. The boy has nothing to do with it. You know there is no love lost between us."

"And you won't even try to get me the money?"

"I shall not."

"Very good! I'll get it in my own way, then." And the young fellow dashed out of the room.

Major Buckley made no attempt to detain him, but sank into his chair, muttering angrily to himself.

After a few moments he resumed his letters, and continued engaged in them until, ten minutes later, he was interrupted by a light tap upon the door.

"Who's there?" he asked gruffly.

"It is I," replied a woman's voice, low and gentle.

"Come in, then."

Mrs. Buckley, the major's second wife, entered, followed by her son, Ralph, and Paddy Hogan.

"What's all this?" demanded the old man with a surprised frown.

"Horace," said the lady, "Ralph has brought home this boy, who he thinks can take the place of Henry, who has left us."

"Bah! he won't do at all!" growled the major.

"But I have questioned him, and I think he will," said Mrs. Buckley.

"I'd do me best to plaze ye, sorr," interrupted poor Paddy, anxiously.

"Why, you're nothing but a greenhorn. I want an experienced man."

"I'm very quick to larn anny'ting, yer honor," said the young emigrant.

"Pray give him a chance, Horace," pleaded Mrs. Buckley.

"Oh, well, have it your own way," said the major, impatiently. "On your head be the responsibility."

"I am willing to take it."

"Well, go away now, and don't bother me any more, for I am very busy."

"Sure, yer honor," interrupted Paddy, "ye'll find me strong an' willin'. I'm obliged to ye, sorr, an'——"

"There, that will do!" said the major, brusquely. "Get along with you."

Paddy and his two friends left the room, and Ralph took the Irish boy down-stairs and introduced him to the other servants.

When he returned to his mother the lad said hotly:

"Mother, why do you ask that man's permission to engage a servant?"

"Hush, Ralph," said Mrs. Buckley, gently. "Major Buckley is my husband."

"But this house and everything in it is yours."

"We need not discuss the question, my son. Let us change the current of our thoughts, and hope that Paddy will prove a useful and faithful servant."

"I'm sure that he will, mother."

And, indeed, Paddy was more than anxious to "plaze."

All that day he worked faithfully, and when he retired at eleven o'clock he was thoroughly tired.

But in spite of his fatigue he slept but lightly, for one of his new duties was to attend to the

furnaces very early in the morning, and he was afraid that he might oversleep.

At last he fell into a doze, from which he awoke with a start.

"I wondher av it isn't toime for me to attend to thim furnaces," he muttered. "Sure I belave it is."

He arose hastily, dressed, and went downstairs, taking a few matches with him to light the gas.

But he found by the big clock in the parlor hall that it was scarcely two o'clock.

He was about to return to his room when a noise in the library attracted his attention.

Looking through the open door, he saw a masked man in the act of entering the house through the library window.

In his hand the burglar carried a dark lantern. He evidently did not see Paddy.

The Irish lad sprang forward.

The next instant he was engaged in a hand-to-hand conflict with the intruder.

CHAPTER V.

A Compromising Position.

The struggle between Paddy and the burglar was not a long one.

The masked man was wirily built, but the Irish lad was his superior in strength.

In a few moments the intruder lay on his back, Paddy's knee on his chest.

"Let me up, curse you!" growled the burglar. "Take your hand off my throat."

Paddy only tightened his grip.

"Not yet, be jabers!" he said, resolutely. "I'll see what ye look loike first."

As he spoke he tore the mask from the face of the prostrate man.

The next moment he started and uttered an exclamation of astonishment.

"It's you, is it?"

For the face that met his gaze was that of Hector Buckley, the son of his employer.

"What do you mean?" demanded the young fellow.

He had decided to make an attempt to "bluff" Paddy, to deny his identity.

He remembered the young Irishman's face perfectly, but thought that Paddy might not recollect his; or that if he did he might be able to persuade him that he was mistaken.

"You know well enough what I mane," said the lad quietly.

"No, I don't."

"Well, thin, I mane that I know ye."

"You know me?"

"Yis."

"And who am I?"

"Masther Ralph tould me yer name; ye're Masther Hector Buckley."

"I am, eh?"

"Yis."

"Ha, ha, ha! You never made a bigger mistake in your life."

"There's no mishtake about it; an' sorry I am there isn't."

For a few moments Hector Buckley said nothing, but he did a great deal of quick thinking.

It seemed useless, after all, to attempt to conceal his identity, for it was evident enough that Paddy knew him perfectly well.

So he affected a laugh, which, it must be confessed, had a rather hollow ring.

"Well, you're right, my boy."

"Av coorse I am."

"Of course you are. Come, let me up, and I'll explain the whole matter to you."

"I dunno about that," said Paddy, dubiously.

"Oh, yes, you do. Let me up; you've half choked me to death."

"Well, thin," said Paddy, "ye may get up, but I warn ye that if ye attmpt to get away I'll sthoph ye."

He released his hold on Buckley, and the young fellow arose.

"Confound it, it's plain enough you're not used to the ways of the country," he said as he adjusted his disordered garments.

"If breakin' into a gentleman's house at two o'clock in the mornin' is one o' the ways of the counthry," said Paddy, "thin, begorra, I'm t'inkin' it'll take a long toime for me to get used to 'em."

"Not so loud! But suppose the house happens to be the 'gentleman's' own?"

"That wud be a different matther, but this house doesn't happen to be yer own, sorr."

"It's my father's, and that's the same thing."

"Begorra, it's not yer father's ayther, an' maybe niver will be," said Paddy promptly.

Hector gave him an ugly look.

"Who told you that?"

"Masther Ralph."

"He did, eh?"

"Yis. But that's nayther here nor there. What I want to know is what ye're doin' here the night?"

"What right have you to know?"

"The roight of a servant, who is bound to protect his master's property."

"Humph! So you are a servant here?"

"I am."

"And what's your name?"

"I'm called Paddy Hogan."

"You are, eh? Well, see here, Paddy, you'll make a big mistake if you ever say anything about this."

"I'm not so sure o' that."

"I can convince you. Why, this is only a joke on my part."

"A joke, is it?"

"Certainly."

"Well, sorr, ye can explain that to yer father, an' maybe he'll be able to see the point o' that same joke betther nor I can. I'm goin' to call him now."

"Hush!"

"What for?"

"Paddy, I'll make it worth your while to say nothing about this."

As he spoke he extended a handful of coin to the Irish boy.

But Paddy drew back proudly.

"No, sorr!"

"Eh?"

"D'ye t'ink I'd bethray me masther for a bit o' dirthy money. Niver!"

"You won't take it?"

"Not I."

"See here, Paddy, I'll give you a ten-dollar note—two pounds, you know—to go back to bed and say nothing about this. Do you agree?"

The answer came without an instant's hesitation.

"No, sorr!"

Hector Buckley stood like a hunted beast at bay.

If the Irish boy fulfilled his threat his ruin would be complete.

A ruse occurred to him.

"Father," he exclaimed suddenly, gazing out into the hall, "is that you? Have you heard?"

Paddy turned quickly, expecting to see the major standing behind him.

As he did so Buckley sprang forward and dealt him a blow on the head.

The boy dropped to the floor like a log, and lay motionless.

The blow had been well aimed.

"Curse the fellow!" muttered Hector, "he made as much noise in falling as a young ox. Perhaps the whole house will be alarmed."

He stepped out into the hall and listened intently for some moments.

Silence reigned throughout the mansion.

"It's all right," mused the young fellow, stepping over the prostrate body of Paddy and entering the library. "Now to make a quick job of it."

He lighted the gas dimly.

Then he stepped to a desk that stood near one of the windows and attempted to open it.

"Locked!" he muttered. "Well, I expected that, but I rather flatter myself that I can open it. But I mustn't be all night about it."

He took a large bunch of keys from his pocket and fitted them, one by one, into the lock.

Not one of them would open the desk.

The smile faded from Buckley's face, and an expression of annoyance and apprehension took its place.

"Well, if I must, I must," he hissed.

He drew a stout chisel from his pocket.

In another moment he had broken open the lock, not without making some noise.

He glanced nervously over his shoulder and listened again.

Not a sound.

Paddy still lay unconscious at the door.

"It's all right," whispered the young fellow; "in another second it'll be done."

He opened a small drawer in the interior of the desk.

The next moment he held in his hand a thick roll of bank-notes.

"All hundreds!" he murmured, hurriedly counting the bills. "There's twice what I need here."

He thrust the roll into his pocket.

Then he moved toward the window through which he had entered the library.

Suddenly he paused and glanced at the prostrate form of Paddy Hogan.

"If he gives me away when he comes to his senses I'll deny it in toto, and my word will surely be taken in preference to his. Hold! a great idea!"

He selected three or four of the stolen bank-notes and put them into the Irish boy's pocket.

While he was in the act of doing this Paddy stirred and uttered a groan.

"Getting over it, eh?" muttered Buckley. "Then I've no time to lose."

He sprang from the window.

The next moment Paddy raised himself upon his elbow and gazed around him with a dazed look.

He rubbed his eyes and murmured:

"Sure, where am I, annyhow?"

The memory of the events of the night quickly returned to him.

He arose to his feet and gazed about him.

"The scoundrel has gone!" he muttered.

"Where is he? Aha!"—as his glance fell upon the desk—"see what he's done!"

He advanced to the desk and examined it.

A slight sound behind him caused him to turn, and he saw standing in the doorway Major and Mrs. Buckley and Ralph.

"So, you thieving scoundrel, I've caught you, have I?" hissed the former.

CHAPTER VI.

A False Accusation.

The sound of Paddy's fall had awakened both the major and his wife.

"Horace, there are burglars in the house!" cried the lady, seizing her husband's arm.

"If there are I'll soon dispose of them," said the valiant major. "But," he added, "perhaps the noise was next door. Let's listen."

They did so, and in a few moments the noise made by Hector in breaking open the desk greeted their ears.

"There's some one down-stairs, that's certain," said the major, a scarcely perceptible quaver in his voice as he got up and lighted the gas. "I'll go down."

He partially dressed himself, as did his trembling wife, and then they cautiously opened the door.

They were surprised to find Ralph standing in the hall.

"You up, my son!" whispered the lady.

"Yes. Didn't you hear that noise, mother?"

"I did. The major and I are going down."

"I was about to do so myself. There is a light in the library. Did you leave it?"

"No; I turned the gas out myself just before I came upstairs."

"Come on," interposed the major in a hoarse whisper, "or the villains will make their escape."

And he started down the stairs, followed by his wife and Ralph.

Their discovery of Paddy at the desk has already been chronicled.

Ralph could hardly credit the evidence of his eyes, and his mother was scarcely less astonished.

As for Major Buckley, there was a triumphant ring in his voice as he uttered the words with which the preceding chapter closes:

"So, you thieving scoundrel, I've caught you, have I?"

He had objected to the employment of the Irish boy by his wife, and was rather pleased than otherwise that the lad had, as he thought, turned out a thief.

For a few moments poor Paddy was too dazed and bewildered to utter a word.

Then he stammered:

"Sure, sorr, ye don't belave me a thafe?"

"What else do you expect me to believe, you young villain? What are you doing here at this hour of the night if you're not stealing?"

"My desk is broken open!" exclaimed Mrs. Buckley.

"Exactly so," returned the major; "and this precious protege of yours has done it. What did I tell you?"

"Paddy," said Mrs. Buckley, with a reproachful look that hurt the Irish lad far more than all her husband's storming, "I would not have believed it of you."

"Ma'am," said Paddy in a choking voice, "I didn't do it; I am not guilty o' this crime. Will no wan belave me?"

"Yes," said Ralph, stepping forward, "I believe you."

"God bless you for thim words, sorr," said the boy, struggling to keep back his tears.

"Well, I don't believe you—I am not quite such a fool as that," said the major; "and when you leave this house it will be in the company of a policeman. Why, see here!"—addressing his

wife—"the drawer in which you keep your money is open, and empty, too! And, by Jove! here's a part of the stolen money."

As he spoke he pulled from the Irish boy's pocket the roll of bills which Hector had placed there.

"Here are four hundred dollars," he said, rapidly counting the money. "Where is the rest of your spoils? Hand it over, you young scoundrel!"

Poor Paddy stared at the major and at the money in speechless amazement for a few moments.

Then he cried in a thrilling voice:

"As Heaven is my judge, I don't know how that money came in my pocket!"

His words did not fail to impress Ralph and Mrs. Buckley, but the major only laughed sarcastically.

"That sort of thing don't go with me, my fine fellow. You may as well give up the rest first as last. Hand it over now."

"I haven't got your money, sorr," said Paddy. "I wudn't touch a penny that didn't belong to me. Aha!"—his countenance lighting up—"I know how the money got there."

"Oh, you do, do you?" sneered Major Buckley.

"Yis."

"Well, I thought you did. And how do you think the bills came in your pocket?"

"That villain put 'em there."

"What villain?"

Paddy hesitated.

If he told the truth who would believe him?

Yet that was the only course left him.

He was about to speak when the major exclaimed:

"There must have been at least two of them. The window is open. That's where the rest of the money has gone."

"Yis," interrupted Paddy, "that is where the rest o' the money has gone, an' your son has taken it."

The major sprang forward and shook his fist in the boy's face.

"You villain!"

"I'm not," maintained Paddy stoutly.

"You dare assert that my son took that money?"

"I say that he did, an' I tell the truth."

"You are a liar, and——"

Major Buckley drew back, and was evidently about to strike Paddy.

But Mrs. Buckley interposed between them.

"Wait!"

The major turned fiercely upon her.

"What do you mean? Why do you interfere?"

His wife met his glance without flinching.

"Because I am determined that justice shall be done."

"Justice!"

"Yes; I begin to have an understanding of

the situation. Paddy," and she laid her hand upon the lad's shoulder, "tell your story."

For a few moments Paddy was silent.

The working of his features betrayed the strong emotions that agitated his being.

At last he said:

"I will tell you all, ma'am; an' not wan word that isn't the truth shall lave my lips."

And he proceeded to detail the events which it has been our duty to relate.

The major, his wife and Ralph listened attentively, the former occasionally interrupting with an incredulous laugh.

"That's the truth, an' nothin' but the truth," said Paddy, in conclusion. "All that I've said I can prove av ye'll gi' me a chance."

"I believe you, Paddy," said Ralph, without a moment's hesitation.

"And so do I," added his mother.

"And so do not I," supplemented Major Buckley. "The story is an incredible, an outrageous one! My son guilty of such a crime! The very idea is absurd!"

"It does not seem so to me," said his wife quietly. "I can readily understand the motives which might actuate Hector to commit such a crime."

"That is all nonsense!" interrupted the major. "My son a thief! Bah! I will not waste time in discussing the matter. Hector, I fancy, will be able to defend himself against this ridiculous accusation."

"He cannot av he tells the truth, sorr," said Paddy, gaining courage now that he saw that he had firm supporters in Ralph and Mrs. Buckley.

"Silence!" stormed the major.

"I'll not be silent whin I have my character to defend," said Paddy.

"You'll have a chance to defend it in a police-court."

"All roight, sorr; I'll do it there as well as here."

"No insolence! Now, for the last time I ask you will you deliver up the money you have stolen and reveal the name of your associate?"

"I can tell you no more than I have tould you, sorr," returned the Irish boy, firmly.

"Very good; the law must take its course."

At this point Mrs. Buckley interposed.

"Reflect, Horace, before you act. If Paddy's story prove to be true—as I believe it is—your son will be publicly disgraced."

The same idea had occurred to Major Buckley, but he replied, stubbornly:

"I have reflected. Hector will be able to vindicate himself against this ridiculous charge."

"Then you wish Paddy to be arrested at once?"

"No; he can remain locked in his room until morning, when I shall place him in the hands of the proper authorities."

"All right, sorr," said Paddy; "lock me up if ye will."

And without further ado he started upstairs, followed by the major, Mrs. Buckley and Ralph.

In a few moments he had been securely locked in his room.

Having performed this task, Major Buckley returned to the library, where a startling surprise awaited him.

CHAPTER VII.

"I Am Master of the Situation."

Although he did his best to conceal the fact, the major was ill at ease.

He was tormented with many misgivings.

While he had affected belief in Paddy's guilt and his son's entire innocence of the crime of which he was accused, he was by no means satisfied in his own mind that Hector was not the real thief.

"He needed the money," muttered the old man; "who knows but that he took this way to procure it? Can it be? I must see the boy and force the truth from him. Of course I'll protect him if it turns out that he is the guilty party. The evidence is all against this young Irishman; let him suffer."

And Major Buckley stepped to the desk and examined it.

While he was thus engaged a sound outside the window attracted his attention.

He started.

"What was that?" he exclaimed. "It sounded like a human voice."

He listened intently.

"Help, father, help!"

The voice was Hector's, and evidently it came from just outside the window.

"What's the matter? Where are you?" demanded the major.

"Hush!"—warningly—"do you want to ruin me?"

Major Buckley leaned from the window.

He found his son lying upon the ground in the back garden, groaning with pain.

"For heaven's sake, what has happened, Hector?" cried the old man in great agitation.

"Hush! I've broken my leg."

"Broken your leg?"

"Yes, in leaping from the window."

"Then it was you who——"

"Who took the money? Yes."

The major was silent for a few moments.

Then he said:

"Hector, you are ruined!"

"No, I'm not, if you will help me."

"What can I do? How can I prevent your inevitable exposure?"

"It isn't inevitable."

"What can be done?"

"Help me to one of the spare rooms upstairs; we can fix up a story later."

"Are you suffering much pain?" asked Major Buckley solicitously.

"Curse it, yes! I could hardly keep quiet while you were carrying on that long-winded dialogue there, but I knew that the slightest sound would betray me. I could see you all, and hear every word you uttered. I was going to try to drag myself into the house if you had not come back."

"Well, I'll help you in, Hector, and we'll see what can be done; but this is an unlucky affair; I'll go and unlock the door and let you in that way."

"Don't make any more noise than you can help."

"Of course I shan't."

Major Buckley re-entered the house by the window.

A few moments later he had opened the door that led into the garden.

He then assisted his son into the library.

It was evident that the attempt to walk caused Hector excruciating pain, but he did not utter a sound.

"Are they all in bed?" he whispered, as he sank into a chair in the library, pale and ghastly.

"I think so; but we had better wait a few minutes before going up. Oh, Hector, what prompted you to embark in this mad enterprise?"

"Now don't lecture me. You forced me to it."

"I?"

"Yes. I told you that I needed the money, that I must have it. You wouldn't give it to me, and so I helped myself."

"But——"

"There are no 'buts' and 'ifs' in the matter," interrupted the young fellow petulantly. "What we've got to consider now is how to get me out of this scrape. What story shall we tell?"

The major reflected a few moments.

"I'll tell them," he finally said, "that you broke your leg in coming up the front steps, and that I accidentally found you there and brought you in."

"That's very thin," commented his son with a doubtful shrug of his shoulders, which was accompanied with a grimace of pain.

"Yes, it is," admitted the major, "but I guess they'll swallow it. At any rate it's the best we can do."

"I suppose you're right. Well, let's have the business over. Get me upstairs and send for a doctor to set this leg, for I'm suffering horribly."

"Wait a moment."

"Why?"

"You've got all the money, except what you put in that boy's pocket?"

"I have."

"Then you'd better give it to me."

"Why should I do anything of the sort?"

"Need you ask that question? Suppose you were searched?"

"That isn't likely."

"It's a pretty strong probability. In fact, I think it would be the proper thing for me to do the indignant act, and insist upon searching you."

"That's not a bad idea."

"Of course it isn't. Give me the money, and I'll do all I can to help you out of this scrape."

Hector handed his father the roll of bills that he had taken from the desk.

The major was about to transfer the money to his pocket when an unexpected interruption occurred.

"I'll take that, if you please," said a familiar voice, and the next moment the stolen money reposed in Ralph Earl's pocket.

The boy had quietly stepped from the adjoining room, unnoticed by either Major Buckley or Hector, and had snatched the roll of bills from the major's hand just in the nick of time.

For a moment neither father nor son spoke.

Then the major, assuming an indignant air, said:

"What does this outrage mean?"

"That's just what I should like to know," returned Ralph, as he met the old man's glance fearlessly.

"Give me back that money!" stormed his stepfather.

"I can't do that," said the boy, with a smile.

"Why can't you?"

"In the first place, because it is not yours."

"Of course it is not mine, nor is it yours either. It belongs to my son. He has fallen and broken his leg, and was just about to transfer his valuables to my keeping when you came in."

"Indeed?" said Ralph, with a scarcely perceptible sneer.

"Yes, indeed. Give me back that money."

"Oh, no, Major Buckley."

"You won't?"

"Certainly not. You may as well know at once, sir, that I have overheard every word of your conversation with your son, and I know all."

"How dare you use such language and such a tone to me?" blustered Major Buckley. "Have a care, boy, or——"

"That will do," interrupted Ralph, as quietly as ever. "I am master of the situation, and you know it. A word from me, Major Buckley, would land your son in a prison cell."

"By Jove! that's so," said Hector, wiping the cold perspiration from his brow. "Father, for heaven's sake let's have an end of this. This kid has the best of us, and I'm half dead from pain and fatigue."

"What do you want me to do?" asked the major in desperation.

Hector turned to Ralph.

"What do you intend to do?" he asked.

Ralph reflected for a few moments.

As he had said, he was master of the situation.

He could dictate terms to his two companions, and they would be forced to accede; for, as he had told them, he could, if he desired, send Hector to a prison cell.

While he was considering the matter his mother entered the room.

Her sweet face wore a distressed expression.

It was evident that she too fully understood the situation.

"Ralph," she said, laying her hand upon the boy's shoulder, "this affair must not be made public."

"But, mother——" began Ralph.

"It must not, I say," the lady interrupted, "for the sake of our family name."

"Certainly not," interposed the major, with something of his usual pompousness. "After all it was only a bit of youthful folly on the part of Hector—an impulsive act which he now, no doubt, bitterly regrets."

"He has reason to," said Ralph, with a glance at the wretched Hector. "But if he is to go scot free, Paddy must be released at once."

"Ahem! Of course," returned the major, reluctantly.

"And must receive an ample explanation and apology."

"I'll not apologize to that Irish clodhopper!" broke in Hector, hotly.

"Then——" began Ralph.

"I will see to all that," said Major Buckley. "Release the boy. But will he keep his tongue still?"

"I will answer for his silence," said Mrs. Buckley.

"Very good; then we will regard this little episode as a family secret," said the major, with a sickly smile. "Hector has been taught a lesson which he will not soon forget."

A few minutes later Paddy was freed and told what had happened.

"I knew the saints wudn't let a poor b'y suffer for what another did," he said. "An' sure, I hould no malice ag'in the young gentleman—he's punished enough."

CHAPTER VIII.

Plottings.

As may be imagined, this adventure did not leave Major Buckley and his son on very good terms with Paddy.

Hector, through his father, asked Mrs. Buckley to discharge the Irish boy, but the lady firmly refused.

Paddy himself volunteered to resign his posi-

tion, but neither Mrs. Buckley nor Ralph would allow him to do so.

"I could kill that fellow if I had a chance," hissed Hector, on the day following the events related in the last chapter.

His father was sitting by his bedside in the room assigned him by Mrs. Buckley.

The young fellow's injuries had proved less serious than had been at first supposed, but he was certain to be confined to his bed for three or four weeks.

"There's no use in your getting excited about it," said the major.

"I fancy you'd be excited if you were in my place," growled Hector.

"The boy has done you no wrong."

"He hasn't, eh? All right; but you wait till I get a chance and I'll get even with him for the harm he has done me."

"He is beneath your notice, Hector. A common Irish servant!"

"I'm not talking about that fellow, although I shall pay him what I owe him—don't you forget that. I mean the boy, Ralph Earl, curse him!"

The major looked serious.

"You'd better be careful what you do in that direction."

"Why?"

"The boy is no fool."

"Well, am I?"

"If anything happened to him you'd be the first one suspected."

"Perhaps not. At any rate I'd give twenty years of my life to get even with him."

"Better be careful, I repeat."

"You seem to be terribly afraid of the kid," sneered Hector.

"Afraid of him?"

"Yes."

"What reason have I to be afraid of him?"

"Every reason."

"I don't understand."

"I think you do; you ought to, at all events. He stands between you and the property you covet."

Major Buckley's brow clouded, and he made no reply.

"You married this widow, thinking that you were going to become master of her fortune, didn't you?"

"Yes."

"She has refused to make a will in your favor, hasn't she?"

"Yes; but in time——"

"Governor, she never will do it while that cub, her son, is around."

"You think——"

"I know what I am talking about. Your hard luck in this business is due more to his influence than to any other cause. In the first place he sized you up a good deal quicker than his mother did."

"Sized me up!" repeated the major indignantly.

"Yes; she married you believing you to be a man so high-minded that you had no thought whatever of her property. The boy didn't believe it, and he told his mother so. She wouldn't listen to him. But when you gave yourself away by demanding that she make a will in your favor she dropped."

"Hector, your slang——"

"Never mind that just now, gov., but let me go on. Since then that kid has lost no opportunity to put in a word against you to his mother, and the result is that she has soured on you to a pretty considerable extent."

"By Jove, you're right, Hector."

"Of course I am."

"He's got an eye to the property, too; and, mark my words, if you keep on as you're going now, he'll get it. She swears by what he says, and he lets no opportunity pass to insult you. I suppose you haven't forgotten last night's scene yet?"

The major ground his teeth.

"I see you haven't. By Jove! I should have laughed at the way he made you cower before him if I hadn't had a personal interest in the matter myself."

"Hector, I——"

"Oh, don't get mad, governor, it isn't worth while. But just bear this in mind: If things keep on in this way, Ralph Earl will be your wife's heir, and you'll be—left!"

"Curse it! what am I to do?" shouted the major.

"In the first place, don't speak quite so loud," laughed his son. "In the second, get rid of the boy."

"Get rid of him?"

"Yes."

"I wish I could."

"You can."

"How?"

There are a good many ways. Now, if he were out of your way it would be clear enough sailing for you."

"Of course."

"Your wife, not having him to consult at every possible emergency, would naturally confide more in you."

"Yes."

"You would soon regain all your old influence over her."

"Undoubtedly."

"The will would be made in your favor, the purse-strings, now tied, would be unfastened, and everything would be lovely for yours truly and his respected parent."

"Ah! you have a personal interest in the matter, eh?"

"Of course I have."

"Humph! Well, Hector, tell me how to get rid of the boy, and I'll do it."

"You mean that?"

"I do."

"You are ready to resort to desperate measures?"

"To any measures that will free me from this boy," cried the major, excitedly. "By Jove! I didn't marry to be treated like a schoolboy, to have a small weekly pittance doled out to me. I expected, nay, I was sure, that the fortune would be mine, or I should never have surrendered my liberty."

"Of course not. Well, now listen, governor, and I'll put up a scheme that will astonish you."

For some time the two men conversed in a low tone.

At first the major rejected the proposition made by his son, but the unprincipled young fellow overruled all his objections; and at last the details of an infamous plot were arranged.

"Hush!" whispered Hector, suddenly, at the end of half an hour. "I think I heard a noise outside the door. Some one may be spying on us."

Major Buckley flung open the door.

Near the threshold stood Paddy Hogan.

"You villain!" cried the major, seizing the lad by the throat, "you've been listening!"

CHAPTER IX.

Paddy's Suspicions Aroused.

If Paddy was not innocent of the charge brought against him by Major Buckley, he certainly was a proficient in the art of dissembling.

His large blue eyes gazed into those of the major with a startled, appealing expression as he struggled to free himself from the old man's clutches.

"You villain," shouted the major, "I'll strangle the life out of you if you don't tell me the truth. Were you, or were you not listening?"

"Don't make such a noise, governor," interposed Hector, impatiently, "or you'll raise the whole neighborhood."

"I don't care if I do," stormed the old man, moderating his tone, however. "Now, then, boy, answer my question."

"Sure, how can I," said Paddy, "whin ye're holdin' me t'roat that a-way? I can't spake at all, at all."

Major Buckley released the boy.

"Now, then, speak," he said.

"Spake," is it?" mumbled Paddy, rubbing his throat and glancing ruefully at himself in the mirror.

"Yes, speak."

"An' what'll I spake about, Major Buckley, sorr?"

"No trifling! Were you listening at that door?"

"Me?"

And Paddy's face wore an expression of mingled surprise and stupidity.

"Yes, you!" thundered the major. "Are you going to answer, or are you not?"

"Sure I am," returned Paddy, retreating as the old man advanced toward him with a threatening gesture. "Ye want to know if I was listenin' at the door?"

"I do; and mind you speak the truth."

"I will, sorr. I hope, Major Buckley, that ye t'ink I know me duty betther nor to do anny'ting o' the sort."

And Paddy met the major's fierce gaze with the most innocent air imaginable.

At this point Hector interposed.

"Say, father!"

"Well?"

"Let up on the boy. Don't you see that he wasn't listening?"

"Sure, ye're roight in spakin' up fer me, sorr," said Paddy.

The major gazed doubtfully at him a few moments.

Then he said:

"Very good; I'll take your word for it. You may go."

"T'ank ye, sorr."

"But mind one thing, boy!"

"What's that, sorr?"

"Never let me catch you listening at my door."

"I'll thry not to, sorr."

There was just a suspicion of a dry smile upon the Irish boy's face as he made this reply—at least Major Buckley fancied so, but he was not sure.

"Don't forget this morning's experience, boy."

"Sure, I don't t'ink I'll be able to if I want to, major," and Paddy again rubbed his neck, "for some time, anyhow."

"Here's half a dollar for you," continued the old man, producing the coin. "Now be off with you."

With a bow and a scrape Paddy left the room.

The major and his son would have been somewhat surprised had they seen what he did when the door between them was closed.

There was a window at the end of the hall. Paddy rushed to it, flung it open and hurled the coin that Major Buckley had given him into the street.

"I'd do the same if it worr tin times as much," he muttered, with a fierce glance in the direction of the room he had just left. "I'll not have yer dirty money, ye thievin' villains! I'd rather beg in the strates than take charity from the loiks of ye."

When Paddy had left the room Hector said:

"You came mighty near making a mess of that affair, governor."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that there was no sense in your rais-

ing all that row. If that fellow had a little more brain his suspicions would be aroused; as it is, probably no harm is done."

"Of course no harm is done."

"It will be as well, however, to keep an eye upon the fellow for a while."

"Nonsense! Let's think no more about him."

"Humph! You change your opinions rather quickly, gov. A few minutes ago yeu were for choking the life out of the lad."

"Well, I was too hasty."

"Yes, I think you were; but don't be too careless now. Remember one thing."

"What's that?"

"He knows that I took that money, and in a measure I am in his power—curse him!" and Hector's face reddened with anger at the recollection of the events of the memorable night of the robbery. "I wish you had killed him! But never mind all that. So it's understood that we're to go into this enterprise to put the boy, Ralph Earl, out of the way, is it?"

"I suppose so," hesitated the old man, "but it's risky."

"Confound it, everything is risky. It's risky to go out in the street, for a house might fall on you, or you might be struck by lightning. I tell you there's a good deal more risk in not going into the scheme than in undertaking it."

"If it should fail——"

"If it should, it won't hurt us; we shall not appear in the matter. Now, gov., leave all the planning to me, and you'll see that I'll make a good job of it."

"Very good; we'll make the attempt, at least, for I know that while the boy is here my chances of getting the fortune are extremely slim."

"Sure, gov."

"And, after all, suppose that when we have rid of the boy this long-lost sister of my wife's should turn up?"

"Suppose nothing!" ejaculated Hector, impatiently. "You might sit there, supposing things all day. Now, dad, you'd better get out, for I'm getting feverish, and you know the doc. says I've got to keep quiet."

"All right."

And the major arose with clouded brow.

"You'll see the fellow to-day, dad?"

"Yes; but, Hector, your knowledge of low life in New York astonishes me."

Hector laughed—a harsh, grating laugh.

"I wasn't born yesterday, gov. You'll find that my knowledge of low life will be of a good deal of service to you in this case if you avail yourself of it."

"I hope so."

And Major Buckley left the room.

As he entered the hall a sound like the scuffling of feet saluted his ears.

He looked suspiciously around him.

No one was in sight.

"I must have imagined it," he muttered. "Con-

found it, this business has rattled me infernally. I must get a little nerve somehow."

He drew a flask from his pocket and took a long draught of its contents.

Then he went downstairs and entered his library.

Scarcely had he disappeared when Paddy emerged from a closet in the upper hall and looked about him with a comically cautious expression.

"Sure," he said, "If I'd had to sthoph there much longer I'd ha' been smothered intirely."

He wiped the perspiration from his forehead.

"Sure, what wud they ha' said if they'd caught me listenin' at their door a second toime?" he continued. "I'm t'inkin' it wud ha' been the last o' me. Now, what am I to do? There's a plot agin Masther Ralph, but I cudn't hear it all. Shall I go an' tell him what I did hear?"

He stood still and reflected a few minutes.

"No," he said at last, "I'll kape me own counsel, an' watch. Bejabbers, they sha'n't harm Masther Ralph if Paddy Hogan is alive; an' jist at the prisint, he is very much so."

"Paddy!" came in a clear, sharp voice from downstairs.

It was Major Buckley's voice, and Paddy replied:

"Sorr?"

"Here's a letter for you to mail."

No one would have thought from the densely stupid look on the Irish boy's face as he descended the stairs and took the letter, that he knew enough even to listen at a door; and Major Buckley decided at once that his suspicions had not been well founded.

CHAPTER X.

Paddy's Blunders.

In the foregoing chapter we may have given the reader an exaggerated idea of Paddy's shrewdness; so it is as well that we relate the events that immediately followed those just detailed, in order that a correct comprehension of our hero's character may be gained.

Paddy was a typical Irish immigrant—a queer combination of "cuteness" and stupidity.

Faithful to the death to a friend, vindictive in the same degree to an enemy, he was a true Hibernian.

He was still very "green," and had made a number of absurd mistakes in the short time he had been in Mrs. Buckley's employ.

It has not seemed necessary that we chronicle them all, but we will relate the events of the morning about which we are writing.

"Mail this letter at once," ordered Major Buckley, as he handed it to Paddy.

"Sorr?" said the youth with wide-open eyes.

"Mail this letter—post it. Do you understand?"

"I do, sorr. But I don't know where is the postoffice. Maybe yez don't be havin' wan in New York?"

"Bah!" growled the major. "You need not go to the postoffice. Drop the letter in one of the street boxes."

"The which, sorr?"

"One of the street letter boxes."

"What's thim?"

"Confound it! I might as well take the letter out myself. You know what a lamp-post is, don't you, you blockhead?"

"I do."

"Well, haven't you seen that there are iron boxes attached to some of them?"

"I didn't take notice, sorr."

"Well, you take notice as soon as you get out."

"I will."

"And when you come to one of the boxes, drop this letter in it."

"Yes, sorr."

"Hold!"

"Yes, sorr."

"I happen to be out of postage stamps, so you'll have to buy one. I suppose you know enough to put it on the letter?"

"I shuppose I do, sorr," returned Paddy, rather stiffly. "Sure, I can rade an' write, an' I have sint letthers mesilf."

"All right; see that you send this one properly. Here are two cents for the stamp; now be off."

"Yes, sorr."

And Paddy left the house.

"Sure," he muttered, as he wandered down the street, "I don't know where thim iron boxes do be, but I'll find wan befoore I go back. But, indade, I don't loike to so much as take a letther for that blayguard, Major Buckley."

As luck would have it, he came to a fire alarm box within a few minutes.

His countenance brightened.

"Sure, I have wan already," he mused. "But how do ye get the letthers into it, at all at all?"

He spelled out the notice upon the door, and learned that the key to the box could be found at a drug store at the next corner.

"Sure," he exclaimed, "I've spint toime enough on this letter, so I have, for Masther Ralph may be wantin' me befoore this. I'll get that kay and put the letther in the box an' be off at wunst."

So he started off at a run, and rushed into the drug store, shouting:

"Have ye the kay to that box yonder?"

"We have," replied the clerk, a nervous young fellow who happened to be the only person in the store. "Do you want it?"

"I do, an' in a hurry, too," replied Paddy.

The clerk, imagining that a fire had broken out

somewhere in the neighborhood, made haste to get the key.

Paddy rushed off with it, muttering:

"Sure, this is the quarest way o' puttin' a lettther in the postoffice iver I see in me loife."

He succeeded in getting the box open without much trouble.

Having carefully deposited the letter inside, he began reading the printed directions.

As he did so an expression of wonder appeared upon his face.

"Sure, what's all this, annyhow?" he murmured. "I'm to pull this little t'ing wanst to the roight, am I? Well, thin, here goes."

Having given the alarm of fire, he closed the box and departed in blissful unconsciousness of the mischief he had wrought.

As he rushed into the drug store and flung the key down upon the counter the clerk asked:

"Where's the fire?"

Imagining that he was being "guyed" on account of his haste, Paddy replied wrathfully:

"Foind out for yersilf, ye spalpeen."

Then he rushed off.

He met the fire engines on his way back, and stopped to watch them.

Having found that there was no fire, the men were about to return, when it occurred to one of them to inquire at the drug store who had sent the alarm.

"It was that young Irishman standing over yonder," replied the clerk, pointing to Paddy, who was stationed near the alarm box watching the engines.

One of the firemen rushed up to him and shouted, in a white heat of excitement:

"So it was you, was it?"

"What was me?" demanded Paddy, with a bewildered stare, so evidently genuine that the man moderated his tone when he asked:

"You sent that alarm of fire, didn't you?"

"I did not. Sure, I didn't know there was any fire at all."

"You didn't?"

"No."

"What did you suppose those engines were out for?"

"Is thim fire engines?"

"Of course they are. What did you think they were?"

"Sure, I t'ought it was a cirkis."

A glimmering of the truth began to dawn upon the fireman's mind.

"A circus, eh?"

"Yes, sorr."

"Well, it is a circus, and a three-ring one, too. Say, didn't you open that box?"

"Sure, I did," replied Paddy, with the utmost promptness.

"What did you do it for?"

"What does anny wan do it for? Sure I had a lettther to mail."

"And you opened that box to mail a letter?"

"I did."

"Well, you're the biggest fool I ever met. Hold on, and I'll get your letter for you."

Inside of two minutes the fireman had informed his comrades of the true state of affairs, procured the key, unlocked the box and given the astonished Irish boy the letter and the two cents that he had deposited in the box with it.

"This isn't a letter box," he explained, "it's a fire alarm box. There's a letter box over yonder; but put a stamp on your letter before you mail it. Be a little more careful how you monkey with such things, Paddy, or you'll get into trouble."

And he rushed off.

Paddy stared about him in greater bewilderment than ever.

"Sure, this is a strange counthry," he murmured, as he turned his steps in the direction of the letter box. "Now, how did he know my name was Paddy?"

Having reached the lamp post, the boy stared at the box in great perplexity.

"Sure, there's no key to this box at all, at all," he muttered, "an' how do ye get into it? Maybe that felly was playin' a thrick on me."

A young fellow who happened to be passing at the moment halted, and with a merry twinkle in his eye addressed Paddy:

"Are you trying to mail a letter?"

"Sure I am."

"Well, why don't you do it?"

"There's no key to the box at all, at all."

"Oh, you don't need a key."

"Ye don't?"

"Certainly not."

And the young man lifted the lid of the box and showed poor Paddy where to put the letter.

"An' is that the way ye do it?" asked the Irish lad, brightening up.

"Of course."

"But, sure, there's no sthamp on the letter."

"Isn't there? Well, I'll tell you what to do."

"What?"

With a half concealed smile the stranger said:

"You've seen those boxes where you put a nickel in the slot and get out a piece of chewing gum?"

"I have," replied Paddy, to whom Ralph had exhibited one of the machines mentioned at the elevated railroad station.

"Well, this works on the same principle."

"It does?"

"Yes. Drop your two cents in the slot; then wait awhile until the machinery inside gets to working, and the stamp will come out. Then stick it on your letter—and there you are."

"An' is that the way ye do it?"

"Cert."

"Sure, this is a wondherful counthry!" exclaimed Paddy.

"Of course it is. But you want to remember one thing."

"What's that, sorr?"

"Be sure to wait until the stamp comes out. Sometimes it takes quite a long time for the stamp to be printed."

"Oh, I'll wait, sorr; niver fear."

"That's right. Well, s'long, Paddy!"

As he walked away the Irish boy exclaimed:

"An' sure, how did he know that me name was Paddy? Begorra, these Amerikins is wondherful payple, so they are!"

He deposited the two cents in the box, and then waited for the stamp to come out.

Fifteen minutes passed; and, growing tired, Paddy sat down on the curbstone.

"Begorra, I wish the sthamp wud be afther comin'," he murmured wearily.

At the expiration of another quarter hour Major Buckley happened along.

"What are you doing here, you blockhead?" he asked. "Why don't you go home?"

"Sure, I'm waitin' for the sthamp, sorr."

"Waiting for what?"

"The sthamp."

And Paddy explained.

"You're the greatest fool I ever saw," exclaimed the irate major. "Here, give me that letter; I'll mail it myself. As for you, go home."

Poor Paddy walked off with an air of offended dignity.

"There's nothing to fear from him," muttered Major Buckley. "I was foolish to waste a moment's thought on him. Why, the fellow is scarcely more than an idiot!"

CHAPTER XI.

Mother and Son.

While the interview between Major Buckley and Hector was going on in the room of the latter, Ralph and his mother were engaged in conversation in Mrs. Buckley's apartment.

Ralph had entered his mother's room, evidently considerably excited.

He was by nature impetuous, and somewhat hot-headed, and he had been thinking over the events of the previous evening until he was very angry.

"Mother," he cried, bursting into the apartment, "how long is this sort of thing going to last."

Mrs. Buckley looked up in mild surprise.

She was a woman who seldom showed signs of agitation, having excellent control of her emotions.

"What do you mean, Ralph?" she asked. "How long is what to last?"

"For a few moments the boy did not reply; then, in a voice choked with emotion, he said:

"Mother, our home is not what it used to be."

With a sigh Mrs. Buckley made a deprecating gesture.

"Say no more, Ralph," she returned, in almost pleading accents.

"But I must speak," cried the boy.

"Why?"

"What happened last night makes it impossible for me to hold my peace any longer.

"Ralph——"

"How long is this man, Hector Buckley, to remain in this house, mother?"

"Surely, Ralph, you would not have me turn him out in his present state?" exclaimed the lady.

"But I cannot bear to have him under our roof. He is a wretch, a thorough scoundrel, if there ever was one."

"I believe that, Ralph; but he will not be here long."

The boy paced the room excitedly.

"It was bad enough," he said, "to have his father take the place of my father, but——"

"Enough, Ralph!" interrupted the lady. "I can hear no more."

"But why will you not speak frankly, mother? Major Buckley——"

"Is my husband!"

"But not my father, thank heaven!"

"My son!"

"Mother," interposed Ralph, "won't you let me speak?"

"What do you wish to say? Go on."

"I believe that you married Major Buckley, not understanding his true character. Is it not so, mother?"

Mrs. Buckley hesitated a few moments.

"Of what use is it to enter into that question?" she said at last.

"Will you not answer me, mother?" pleaded Ralph.

Again the lady hesitated.

Then she replied:

"I will answer you, Ralph. Yes, I was under a misapprehension as to Major Buckley's character and disposition. Your father, whose friend he was, regarded him as a high-minded, noble man, and I believed that his opinion was well-founded. Major Buckley came to me with protestations of esteem and love. I had found the management of my estate a difficult and perplexing task, many responsibilities which I found it almost impossible to assume were involved. So I yielded to Major Buckley's persuasions and became his wife."

"And in a very short time," interposed Ralph with flashing eyes, "he attempted to induce you to make a will leaving all your property to him."

"Yes, but he could never persuade me to do that."

"Are you sure of that, mother?" asked Ralph with a searching glance.

"Perfectly," replied the lady quietly. "You need have no fear upon that score, my son. I

have the strongest of reasons for persistently refusing to adopt such a course."

"What reasons, mother?"

"I think you know them, Ralph. In the first place my sense of what is due you and myself would prevent my acceding to the major's desire. Secondly, to be perfectly frank with you, Ralph, I do not think that Major Buckley is the man to be intrusted with the care of a large fortune."

"I am glad that you have come to that conclusion, mother."

"I have been forced to it. Major Buckley has shown the cloven foot; his demands for money have of late been so frequent that I have been obliged to refuse to give him anything but a certain weekly allowance—which he declares to be totally inadequate to meet his wants. But I have a third and a still stronger reason."

"And that is, mother——"

"The duty I owe my sister, who may still be alive."

"But do you think it possible that she still lives, mother?"

"Of course it is possible, but I fear that it is not probable," returned the lady.

"But the property is rightfully yours, mother, not hers."

"No, Ralph, it is hers. In the eyes of the world, perhaps, it is mine. But she was my father's favorite child, while I incurred his displeasure by marrying the man of my choice, your father, whom he did not like. It was always his intention to leave his property to my sister Alice, but he died intestate. Alice's whereabouts could not be learned; it was believed that she was dead, and the property became mine. But I feel, I always have felt, that I only hold it in trust for her. Some day she may come and claim it."

"But that is not likely, mother. Think how many years it is since you have heard from her."

"True. It was eighteen years ago that she sailed for Europe with a concert company of which she was the prima donna. She had a fine voice, and it was believed that she would achieve a great reputation. But before the first concert was given she mysteriously disappeared. She has never been heard of since. She may be dead—I dare not hope that she lives—but while a doubt remains I cannot, will not, part with the fortune that is rightfully hers."

"If you should learn of her death, mother——"

"Even then I would not surrender my property to Horace Buckley," replied the lady, an unwonted fire lighting up her eyes. "But even if she does not live, she may have left heirs. Some day the true owners of my father's estate may claim it. When they do, I shall not hold it back—nor will you, my son, if the claim should be made after I have passed away."

"I shall always be mindful of your wishes, mother," replied Ralph gravely.

"I know it, my boy," and Mrs. Buckley pressed a kiss upon his forehead. "And now leave me, for

this interview has exhausted me extremely, and I must rest."

Ralph returned his mother's caress and left the room.

Little did either of them imagine the frightful peril through which he was destined to pass before they met again.

CHAPTER XII.

Major Buckley Hesitates.

Despite the agitation of his mind, Major Buckley could not help smiling as he walked away from Paddy after the episode of the letter, recorded in a former chapter.

But the smile soon faded from his face, and his brows again contracted with deep thought.

"It's dangerous business," he muttered, as he hurried in the direction of Broadway. "I don't half like to meddle with it; but, confound it! what am I going to do? The woman whom I married, believing that I could mold her to my will, turns out to have a will of her own, and a deucedly strong one. Why, by Jove! I occupy the position of a mere dependent in her house, instead of being its master."

The old man's face colored with anger.

"It's principally that boy's work, curse him!" he went on hotly, oblivious of the curious glances of the passers-by against whom he jostled. "If he's put out of the way I shall be master of the fortune and its present owner. It shall be done. Hector was right. There is no other course open to me."

As he spoke he boarded a Broadway car.

Then, noticing that he was attracting attention by his half-articulate words, he relapsed into silence.

But the burden of his reflections was the same. Major Buckley had always borne a good reputation.

He had mingled in New York's best society, and had been looked upon as a gentleman of refinement and culture—a "man of the world" in the best sense of the term.

But the only reason he had never fallen into crime was that the temptation had never been offered him.

He had been reared in luxury; until he reached manhood his every wish had been gratified.

When his father died he inherited his entire estate.

It took him but a year to run through the property; then he married a wealthy woman, upon whose fortune he lived in luxury for many years.

Upon her death he inherited only a portion of her estate, which he quickly dissipated in reck-

less speculation; assisted, it need not be said, by his hopeful son, Hector.

Then he began paying attentions to the widow of his old friend, Redmund Earl.

Mrs. Earl was of a confiding nature, and the care of her fortune perplexed her.

The major won her respect and esteem, if not her love, and she consented to become his wife.

Too late she had awakened to the bitter truth—that she had made a fatal mistake. But Major Buckley, as we have seen, did not succeed in accomplishing the purpose for which he had sacrificed what he was pleased to term his “liberty;” the fortune was not his, after all, and he found himself forced to choose between resigning it and committing a hideous crime.

He left the car only a few blocks below Fourteenth street, and proceeded eastward until he reached a small liquor saloon not far from the East River.

Gazing upon the building with an expression of disgust, almost of loathing, he muttered:

“Can this be the place? A more disreputable spot I never saw. And Hector seemed perfectly familiar with it. Well, I was a wild enough young fellow years ago, but I never descended to this sort of thing. Shall I enter the place or not?”

The good and evil within him struggled for the mastery.

It was a supreme moment in the life of Horace Buckley.

The matter was decided, as many of the most important affairs of our lives often are, by a mere trifle.

A dozen or more heads protruded from the windows of the tenement houses in the immediate vicinity—heads of the wretched, bleary-eyed, half-starved residents of the locality.

All were gazing curiously at Major Buckley.

At last one husky voice said:

“Stag his nibs.”

This was the signal for a chorus of comments in the same vein.

“Where did he blow in from?”

“Get onter der dicer!”

“Chuck a brick at him!”

“He’s escaped from der Eden Musee!”

These and other similar remarks saluted the ears of the fastidious Major Buckley, and they were accompanied by shouts of laughter.

“The infernal wretches!” he muttered. “It won’t do for me to make myself too conspicuous here—I may be remembered.”

And he hastily entered the saloon.

Some new object of interest greeted the eyes of the watchers, and “his nibs” was soon forgotten.

Half an hour elapsed before Major Buckley emerged from the den.

His face was pale, his features were drawn and set.

“My God!” he muttered, as he hurried in the direction of Broadway, “can such things be? I

have lived all my life in great cities, but never did I see such a picture of degradation. Well, it is done, and I do not regret it. Soon this boy will be removed from my path; then to gain possession of the fortune will be easy.”

Yet he shuddered as he spoke; the transition from weakness to crime had been made, but Major Buckley was not yet hardened.

When he returned home his wife observed the marks of extreme agitation upon his countenance and commented upon them, but he laughed them away.

When he was alone with his son, the young fellow demanded eagerly:

“Well, is it done?”

“Yes,” returned Major Buckley, with an involuntary gesture of disgust.

“What’s the matter, gov.?”

“That place—those people!”

“Well, they’re not the sort you meet in the best society, but they’re mighty useful tools once in a while, as you have found out.”

“That saloon seems to be the headquarters of an organized band of criminals.”

“That’s what it is,” replied Hector, coolly.

“But how did you find out anything about it?”

The young fellow laughed.

“Oh, I know the shady side of the big metropolis about as well as any one.”

“I should imagine so. And they seem to know you there much better than I do.”

Again Hector laughed—a short, disagreeable laugh.

“Hector,” said his father gravely, “I’m afraid you are not what I supposed you to be. You were not educated according to Puritanical rules, I never desired that you should be, but I did hope——”

“Give us a rest, governor,” interposed Hector, coarsely. “If there is a time to preach, this certainly is not it, and you are not the man to do it, either.”

“I——”

“We are in the same boat, and let me tell you that my knowledge of low life in the great city is of a good deal of benefit to you now. Well, you saw old Methuselah, of course?”

“Yes; he is a strange man, Hector.”

“He’s one of the smartest men in this country, governor, and might have occupied any position.”

“And yet he chooses a life of crime!”

“He is a king in his way, and exerts absolute control over his band. They obey his orders without question, for they know that old Methuselah punishes insubordination severely.”

“What is his real name?” asked Major Buckley, curiously.

“That no one knows, not even his intimate associates. To them he is simply known as Methuselah—and he looks old enough to justify the use of the nickname. But I sometimes fancy that he is not quite as old as he looks.”

“The same thought occurred to me. His

bright, piercing black eyes are not like those of an old man, nor is his voice weak or quavering."

"Whatever his age or name may be, he is in full possession of all his faculties, and they are sharper than those of most men. They say that he was once a detective of some eminence, but that he did some crooked work on a case and got a bad name. Then he went into his present business, if you call it a business; and his long and intimate knowledge of crime and criminals brought him success and a fortune."

"A fortune?"

"Oh, yes; Methuselah is a very wealthy man, although he doesn't look it. The story I've told you may not be true, but it is generally believed by the old man's associates. Hark! was not that the front door closing?"

"Yes," responded Major Buckley.

"Step to the window and see if it is not Ralph."

Major Buckley obeyed.

"Yes," he said, "it is he."

A smile appeared upon Hector's features.

"Good!" he exclaimed. "He will never re-enter the house again."

CHAPTER XIII.

Paddy Makes a New Acquaintance.

There was another who heard Ralph Earl leave the mansion—Paddy Hogan.

"He's goin' out," he muttered excitedly to himself. "I'll follow him, an' if thim villains thrys anny o' their tricks on him, let thim look out for Paddy Hogan."

But at this moment he heard a voice calling:

"Paddy!"

It was Mrs. Buckley.

The Irish lad hurried to her room.

"What is it, ma'am?"

The lady gazed searchingly into his face.

"Why, you seem excited, Paddy!"

"I am—that is, I'm not, ma'am," stammered the lad.

"Has anything gone wrong?"

"Yes—I mane no, ma'am."

Supposing that his agitation was caused by some new mistake or blunder in the discharge of his duties, Mrs. Buckley only smiled and said:

"Well, be very careful, Paddy, and all will probably go well."

"God grant it, ma'am," responded the boy, fervently. "May I go now?"

"In a moment, Paddy; I have an errand for you to do."

"And errand, is it, ma'am?"

"Yes; I want you to deposit a sum of money in the bank for me. Do you think you can do it?"

"I'll thry, ma'am," returned Paddy, shifting from one foot to the other in his impatience to be off.

Of course he wanted to follow Ralph, and he knew that if he did not start at once the boy would be out of sight.

"I will fill out a deposit blank," said Mrs. Buckley, seating herself at a table.

The deliberate manner in which she wrote the document was almost maddening to poor Paddy.

But at last it was finished, and she handed it to the lad with the bank-book and money.

When she had directed him how to find the bank she said:

"I am showing you now how much confidence I repose in you, Paddy; there are fifteen hundred dollars here."

Paddy gasped for breath.

"Fifteen hundhred dollars, ma'am!"

"Yes. Now make haste and deposit it, and return as soon as you can."

Paddy did not have to be told to make haste twice.

He rushed downstairs three or four steps at a time, and was out of the house in a "jiffy."

He gazed about him in all directions.

Ralph was nowhere to be seen.

"He's gone!" gasped Paddy, his jaw falling. "Sure, I was afraid of it! Oh, I wish I'd followed him an' paid no attintion at all to the mistress; for, sure, isn't her son of more consequence to her than her money? But it's too late to think o' that now."

He hurried toward Broadway, carrying the bank-book in his hand with the greenbacks protruding from either end.

"Sure," he murmured, "if I niver see the young masther ag'in, if thim villains has done away wid him, I'll have thim punished if it takes the rist o' my life. Oh, wirra, wirra! why didn't I tell him all I overheard befoore he wint out?"

He was so occupied with his reflections that he did not observe two rather flashily dressed men who stood upon the opposite sidewalk watching him.

Their eyes were fixed greedily upon the bank-book, which he was so conspicuously displaying.

After a consultation one of them crossed over, and, rushing up to Paddy, exclaimed, with outstretched hand:

"Why, Paddy, is that you?"

Thus suddenly aroused from his reflections, the lad started and looked up.

"Sure it is me, an' no other," he said, not taking the proffered hand, however. "An' how did ye know my name?"

"Why, don't you remember me, Paddy?" asked the fellow, with an air of the most intense surprise.

"I do not."

"I knew you as soon as I saw you."

"Ye did?"

"Certainly; I have a cousin in your village,

and I was over visiting him a while ago, and that was when I saw you."

Poor, innocent Paddy's face lighted up.

"Was yer cousin Mike Mooney?"

"Of course," returned the stranger, promptly.

"I remimber he had a cousin from Ameriky visitin' him about two years ago, but I t'ink I niver seen him."

"Well you see him now, for I'm the man."

"An' is this so?"

Paddy took the fellow's hand, which had remained extended throughout the dialogue, and shook it heartily.

Nothing is more cheering to an emigrant in a strange land than to meet one who is familiar with the scenes and faces so far away and so dear.

"Of course it's so," said the stranger, returning the pressure of Paddy's hand with interest. "And how is Mike?"

"Foine."

"I'm glad to hear it. As luck will have it, Paddy, we're within a stone's throw of my room on Third Avenue; come up and have something to drink with me."

"Sure I can't."

"Why not?"

"I'm on an errand for the misthress."

"Oh, never mind that; just come up and have a glass of beer, and we'll talk over old times a few minutes. Come on, my boy, if you're a true Irishman."

And linking his arm in that of the not unwilling Paddy, he gently forced him in the direction of Third Avenue.

"Well, thin, I'll go wid ye jist for a minute," said the Irishman, his heart warming toward his companion as he thought of the far-away home and friends.

"Of course you will," said his companion, with an oily smile.

A few moments' walk brought them to Third Avenue.

Having proceeded down that street a short distance, the stranger said, as he paused before a door:

"Well, here we are."

"An' is this where ye live?" asked Paddy.

There was a "groggery" on the ground floor, and from the interior of the dark, dingy hallway, revealed as Paddy's companion opened the door, came a damp, noxious odor.

"It is," replied the stranger; "it's the best Barney Finnegan can afford just now."

"An' is yer name Barney Finnegan?" asked Paddy.

"Of course it is; didn't I tell you so before?"

"Ye did not."

"Then I forgot."

"There's a family o' Finnegans I know in County Roscommon."

"That's the family I come from," asserted the alleged Barney Finnegan promptly.

Just then the man who had been conversing with him on the opposite side of the street, and whom Paddy had not seen, came running up.

"Hello, Barney, old man!"

"Why, Jimmy, is that you?"

And the two shook hands as if they had not met for years.

Then Finnegan turned to Paddy.

"This is my friend, Mr. Mahon—Jimmy Mahon."

"Glad to know you, sir," said the newcomer. "Going up to your room, Barney?"

"Yes; my friend and I are going to take a glass of beer together. Come along, won't you?"

"Don't care if I do. Besides, I've got a little game I want to show you."

"A game, eh?" laughed Finnegan. "Well, come up, and we'll see what it's like."

The two schemers ascended a rickety flight of stairs, followed by poor, simple-minded Paddy, who had no suspicion of the nature of the company he was in.

Finnegan unlocked a door at the head of the stairs and ushered his two companions into a dingy back room.

"Sit down, gents," he said, as he produced a couple of bottles of beer from a closet. "Make yourselves at home. And now, Jimmy, let's see what this little game of yours is?"

CHAPTER XIV.

Jimmy's Little Game.

Paddy waited with considerable interest to see what this new game of "Jimmy's" was like.

But its possessor seemed to be in no particular hurry to exhibit it.

"Wait till we've had our beer, Barney," he said, "then I'll show it to you and your friend, Mr.—— I think you didn't mention his name."

"Me name's Hogan," said Paddy, "at yer service."

"I told you it was Hogan, but you've forgotten," said Finnegan. "Well, here's luck!"

The three glasses were drained, and then Mahon said:

"Well, it isn't exactly a game, either; it's just a little trick that I've learned—a sort of sleight-of-hand performance. See?"

"If it's sleight-of-hand, you can't do it," laughed Finnegan. "I never saw you attempt a trick yet that you didn't make a mess of."

"You didn't, eh?" said Mahon, pretending to be offended. "Well, you'll see me do one now. Lend me your hat, Barney."

Finnegan handed him the hat.

Mahon then removed his own from his head and placed it upon the table beside his friend's.

This done, he produced a small rubber ball from his pocket.

He placed it under one of the hats, then he said:

"Now, then, Barney, I'll bet you fifty dollars you can't tell which hat the ball is under."

"I can't, eh?" said Finnegan, laughing loudly.

"Why, it would be robbing you to take that bet."

"That's all right," said Mahon; "put up your money."

"I'll do it," said Finnegan. "Here, we'll place the stakes in the hands of our friend Hogan."

Each of the men handed Paddy a fifty-dollar bill.

The Irish lad was watching the game with deep interest.

Old as it was, it was new to him.

He was sure that he knew which hat the ball was under, and that Finnegan was certain to win the money.

And so it proved.

"The ball is here," said Finnegan, and he lifted one of the hats.

And, of course, the ball was there.

"I wasn't quite quick enough," said Mahon, with an air of chagrin. "Well, Mr. Hogan, give Barney the stakes."

Poor Paddy handed Finnegan the money.

"Now, then, I'm going to try again," announced Mahon, "and this time I'll succeed. Barney, I'll make the bet a hundred this time."

"You must want to throw away your money," said Finnegan. "However, if you say it, it goes."

The same performance was repeated.

Mahon placed the ball under the hat so awkwardly that there could be no possible doubt as to where it was, and Finnegan again pocketed the stakes.

Mahon affected great disappointment and surprise.

"I don't see how I missed it," he said.

"Oh," laughed Finnegan, "you're N. G. as a sleight-of-hand man. Better chuck that ball away."

"No, I won't," returned Mahon, with affected anger. "I'll tell you what I'll do, Mr. Hogan," turning to Paddy, "I'll bet you a hundred that you can't tell which hat the ball is under."

"Sure, I have no money," said poor Paddy, simply.

"That'll do to tell," laughed Mahon. "Didn't I see the hundred-dollar bills sticking out of that bank-book that you just put in your pocket?"

"But thim is not mine."

"Not yours?"

"No; they are the misthress's."

Finnegan drew Paddy aside.

"I say, old man."

"What?"

"Take Mahon up and make a cool hundred for yourself. You're sure to win—he can't do the trick, as you have seen for yourself."

Paddy hesitated.

"He's got more money than he knows what to do with," went on Finnegan, persuasively, "and you may as well have a little of it."

"But I tould ye I had no money," said Paddy.

"I know you did; but what's the matter with borrowing some of your mistress' spare cash?"

Paddy started.

"Sure I cudn't do that!"

"Why couldn't you?"

The lad hesitated.

It was a strong temptation.

"If I lost it!" he exclaimed, dubiously.

"But you couldn't lose it, my dear boy; it's a dead sure thing."

Perhaps Paddy would have yielded had not an unexpected interruption occurred at this moment.

There was a sharp knock at the door.

Finnegan sprang up and answered the summons.

"You're wanted!" Paddy heard a hoarse voice whisper.

"Wanted?" returned Finnegan.

"Yes."

"By whom?"

"Methuselah."

Paddy gave a start of surprise.

"Begorra," he thought, "that's the name I heard thim two blayguards, Major Buckley and his son, use."

He now listened intently.

"What does he want?" asked Finnegan, in a changed tone.

"That's for him to tell you—I don't know," was the reply.

"When does he want me?"

"As soon as you can come."

"Say I'll be there inside of half an hour."

"All right."

"Hold on!"

"What's the matter?"

"Just give me the address again."

"I thought every man in your line in the city knew it; it's No. 473 East ——— Street."

"I'll be there soon."

"See that you are, for Methuselah will stand no funny biz."

And the visitor departed.

Finnegan closed the door and returned to the table.

"Well," said Mahon, impatiently, "is Mr. Hogan going to take me up or not?"

"He is—not," replied Paddy, with great promptness.

The brief conversation he had overheard had opened the Irish lad's eyes to the character of the two men.

He arose to leave the place.

But both his companions sprang to their feet.

They did not intend to let the coveted prize go so easily.

"What do you mean, Mr. Hogan?" demanded Mahon, with an air of indignation.

"What do I mane, is it?"

"Yes."

"I mane jist what I say—that I'll not bet wid ye."

"And why not?" asked Mahon, exchanging glances with his "pal."

"For several raisons that I have," replied Paddy, moving toward the door.

"What are they?" persisted Mahon.

"Yes, what are they?" chimed in Finnegan.

"You owe us both an explanation for your singular behavior."

"Well, thin," said Paddy, "in the first place I mane that I'm no thafe."

"No thief!" exclaimed Mahon.

"Jist so; and in the second place, that I belave you are."

Both men rushed toward the boy with threatening gestures.

"Sthand off," cried Paddy, doubling up his fists, "or I'll make yez wish yez had."

They did not heed the warning.

The next moment Finnegan received a blow from the Irish lad's fist that stretched him upon the floor.

Before Mahon could reach him, Paddy had left the room; in a few seconds he was on the street.

"It was Hiven's own mercy that sent me there," he exclaimed. "Now I have the address o' the place, an' I'll save Masther Ralph or die wid him."

At this moment Finnegan came rushing out of the house.

His eye blazed with fury, and he approached Paddy with clenched fists.

"You young Mick!" he exclaimed with an oath, "I'll teach you a lesson that you won't soon forget."

"Ye will, eh?" said Paddy, composedly. "Well, I'm always willin' to learn, but I have very little time now."

"You can make some, then."

"An' is that so? Well, if there's any t'achin' to be done I belave I'll do it. I've taught ye wan lesson already, ye blayguard, an' I'm ready to give ye another."

"You are, eh?" shouted Finnegan.

"I am," replied Paddy, holding his ground. "There's a frind o' mine comin' yonder; I t'ink I'll lave the matther to him."

Finnegan turned quickly.

Paddy's "frind" proved to be a uniformed policeman.

It did not take the swindler long to disappear, and our hero went on his way, muttering:

"Maybe I'm not as grane as I look, afther all. Now, thin, Masther Ralph, we'll see if I know enough to save ye."

CHAPTER XV.

The Plotters at Work.

It did, indeed, seem providential that Paddy had met the two swindlers, Mahon and Finnegan, as they had called themselves, who attempted to rob him of the money he was taking to the bank for Mrs. Buckley.

The lady had detained him so long that he had not been able to follow Ralph, as he had intended.

In the conversation between Major Buckley and Hector, which he had overheard, the name "Methuselah" had been mentioned, and Paddy had gained some idea of the character and reputation of the terrible old man who seemed to be the ringleader of a band of desperados, and one of those intimately connected with the proposed abduction and destruction of Ralph Earl.

But the old man's address had not been mentioned; and not having been able to follow Ralph, the Irish boy would not have known where to go had he not overheard the address in the house into which he had been inveigled by the man Finnegan.

Having deposited Mrs. Buckley's money in the bank, the simple-minded Irish lad turned his steps in the direction of East ——— Street.

It was his firm purpose to save Ralph from the toils of the villains who were plotting against his life, but he had little idea of the terrible odds against him.

Let us now return to Ralph Earl.

When he left his mother's house he did not observe a plainly-dressed, elderly man who stood upon the opposite corner.

But this individual observed him, and followed him from the moment he descended the steps of the mansion.

When Third Avenue was reached the stranger was only a few rods behind the lad.

At this point a new character in the drama appeared.

This was a miserably-dressed, haggard-looking girl of perhaps twelve.

In obedience to a signal from the stranger, she approached him.

A whispered conversation followed.

The man pointed to Ralph.

"That's him," he said.

"That boy?"

"Yes. You know your part?"

"Yes; but—but he looks so handsome, so good. They won't harm him, will they?"

"Never you mind about that," said the stranger in a fierce whisper. "You know what you've been told to do—go and do it."

By this time Ralph had turned into Third Avenue and was nearly a block away from the couple.

"Follow him—quick!" added the man "and

if you make a mess of the job you know what you'll get from Methuselah."

Without another word the girl turned and ran down Third Avenue in the direction taken by Ralph Earl.

Just before she reached the boy she commenced sobbing and crying.

Ralph turned.

His sympathetic nature was at once moved by the sight of the girl's apparent distress, and he asked:

"What's the matter?"

The child removed her hands from her face and looked up into Ralph's eyes.

The lad gazed upon her with an interest that was not to be wondered at.

Her delicate oval face and finely chiseled features indicated a refined, almost artistic nature.

Her large brown eyes, shaded by long dark lashes, gazed at the boy's features with an appealing look as she said:

"I am very poor, sir."

It scarcely seemed necessary to announce that fact; the girl's patched and tattered garments certainly indicated it plainly enough.

So thought Ralph as he inquired in a gentle tone:

"Well, what can I do for you?"

At the same time he drew out his purse.

But the girl drew back.

"No, sir," she said, "I can't take your money."

"I thought that was what you wanted," said Ralph bluntly.

"No, no," sobbed the child.

"Then what do you want? You say you are very poor?"

"Yes."

"What can I do for you?"

"My grandpa is very sick, sir—I am afraid he is dying."

And apparently the girl burst into a flood of tears.

She was only playing a part, but she played it well, and Ralph Earl was deceived.

"I am very sorry for you," he said, and there was genuine sympathy in his voice. "What can I do for you?"

"There are institutions in New York that help poor people, aren't there, sir?" asked the child.

"Yes, many of them."

"Do you know where they are?"

"I can easily find out."

"And will you, sir?"

"Certainly."

"But first, sir, won't you please come with me and see my poor grandpa? He is very, very sick, and if you only would——"

"Of course I will," interrupted Ralph. "Where do you live?"

"On East —— Street, sir, near the river," was the reply. "It's a very poor place, sir, and I'm ashamed to take you there."

"You needn't be," said Ralph, gently. "Come, let us go at once. Are your parents living?"

"No, sir; they have both been dead four years."

And as they walked down Third Avenue the child told a tale of distress so pathetic that it brought tears to Ralph's eyes.

She was one of a class that is startlingly large in every great city—the class of professional criminals, those who are educated from their birth to look upon the rest of mankind as their legitimate prey.

And a more dangerous member of the juvenile portion of this class could scarcely be found than this girl, with her sweet, almost angelic face, her large, pleading eyes, and her voice, the sound of which sent an involuntary thrill of sympathy through her companion's frame.

Trained from her very infancy to deceive, it is no wonder that she did her work well.

Yet a physiognomist would have declared that in the girl's nature there were elements that would have fitted her for a high and noble life.

Hers was a naturally fine organization warped and distorted by cruel circumstances, but not yet degraded past hope of redemption.

Ralph's confidence in her was, in one sense, not misplaced, for the child, though forced to act a part, did it unwillingly, and in her heart felt the same confidence for the lad she was imposing upon that she inspired in his heart.

"I will do all I can to help you," said Ralph, when his companion had finished her story. "I will speak to my mother about you and your grandfather. But is this where you live?"

For the girl had paused before a tenement.

It was the same house that we have seen Major Buckley enter.

It is no wonder that Ralph gazed upon it, and upon the wretched denizens of the neighborhood with an air of disgust.

"Yes, sir," replied the child, "this is my home. It's a poor place, sir, but it's the best grandpa and I can afford. Will you come upstairs, sir?"

"Certainly," replied the boy. "Lead the way."

The girl preceded him up the narrow, rickety stairs and opened the door of a room in the rear of the building.

The apartment was enveloped in gloom. Ralph could see nothing beyond the threshold, but a feeble voice inside asked:

"Is that you, Annie?"

"Yes, grandpa," replied the girl, "and I have brought a young gentleman to see you."

CHAPTER XVI.

Ralph in the Toils.

"A young gentleman?" croaked the voice. "Bring him in."

Ralph entered the room, followed by the girl.

Upon a low couch lay stretched the form of a gaunt, haggard old man, whose dark, deeply-sunken, yet bright and piercing eyes looked sharply at the visitor's face as he said:

"Shut the door, Annie."

The child obeyed.

At this instant Ralph chanced to turn and look at her.

Her face wore a frightened, apprehensive look that surprised and startled him.

At once his suspicions of foul play were aroused.

Almost involuntarily he stepped toward the door.

But as he did so the old man sprang from the bed and clutched him by the throat.

It was evident enough from the strength he displayed that he was no invalid.

A desperate struggle ensued.

The old man was strongly and wirily built, and Ralph was almost his match.

The boy had cultivated athletics, and his practice served him in good stead now.

He realized that he had been entrapped, and was in imminent danger, and he exerted himself to the utmost.

But the old man had gained an advantage at the outset, and he steadily maintained it.

Ralph found that he was weakening.

By a supreme effort he tore himself from his adversary's grasp and rushed toward the door again.

But as he did so he received a blow on the temple, inflicted, not by the old man, but by a stalwart fellow who, unseen by him, had emerged from an adjoining room.

As Ralph sank unconscious to the floor, the girl sprang forward, exclaiming:

"Oh, you are not going to kill him!—you are not, are you?"

She sank upon her knees at the feet of the old man.

He seized her roughly by the shoulder, hissing: "Never you mind what I'm going to do—what is it to you? Here, get out with you!"

And he dragged her to the door and thrust her out into the hall with brutal force.

Then, having closed the door, he said, addressing the man who had struck Ralph:

"You came just in time."

"Yes."

"The youngster has got muscle enough."

"He must have to have held his own against you as he did, Methuselah."

"Yes, he is a powerful young fellow."

"What's to be done with him?"

The old man whispered a few words in his companion's ear.

"That's it, is it?" was the response, as the fellow gave a glance at Ralph's prostrate body.

"That's it."

"You're sure you can trust the girl?"

"Why not?"

"She seemed to show a good deal of interest in the kid."

"That's all right. Who dares disobey Methuselah? Certainly not she. Now, then, we must waste no more time in words; to work."

* * * * *

It was with a strange feeling of bewilderment that Ralph Earl slowly recovered his senses.

He opened his eyes and gazed about him.

Where was he?

His first thought was that his surroundings were a part of a dream from which he would presently awaken.

Then, one by one, the events of the day returned to him.

He struggled to his feet.

He was the inmate of a circular dungeon, perhaps eight or ten feet in diameter, dimly lighted from above by an iron grating.

The place looked not unlike an old well that had long been unused.

A damp, noxious odor greeted the boy's nostrils.

The side walls of the dungeon, which were of stone, and the cement floor, were covered with a fungus growth; snails, and other similar creatures which thrive in damp localities, crawled slowly about.

The atmosphere of the place oppressed the helpless prisoner and sent a vague chill of horror to his heart.

Was there no escape from this horrible dungeon?

Apparently the only means of egress was from the top, and the iron grating was too far above the boy's head for him to hope to reach it.

"Help! help!" he cried.

There came no response.

Again and again he repeated the appeal, but fruitlessly.

To what horrible fate had he been condemned by his mysterious enemies?

Was he doomed to die of cold and starvation?

He examined his prison closely, and his attention was presently attracted by a number of small round holes in the wall, perhaps a foot from the floor.

They were drilled in the stone, and were each about an inch in diameter.

For what purpose were they intended?

Ralph could not imagine.

But when an hour had passed he learned.

A small stream of water began to flow from each of the openings.

In a few moments the floor of the dungeon was covered with water to the depth of several inches, and it continued to rise rapidly.

Then the truth burst upon the boy.

He was doomed to be drowned!

As this thought flashed through his mind an involuntary cry of horror burst from his lips.

What motive could any one have had to commit this awful crime?

To his knowledge Ralph had not an enemy in the world, except, perhaps, Major Buckley and Hector.

It did not for a moment occur to him to suspect either of them of complicity in the plot to abduct him.

He had no realization of the baseness of their natures.

And could it be that the sweet-faced child whom he had accompanied to the place could have had any knowledge of the fate to which he was to be doomed?

It was difficult for him to believe it, but he was forced to do so.

The whole experience seemed like a dream to him.

Perhaps he would awaken and find himself at home!

He tried to make himself believe this, but in vain.

His surroundings were all too horribly real; the shadowy, uncertain atmosphere of a dream did not envelop them.

The water continued to rise steadily.

Soon it reached his knees, then his waist, then his chest.

Slowly, but with dreadful certainty, it rose; soon it would reach his neck.

The boy gave himself up as lost.

A strange calmness seized him.

Closing his eyes, he breathed a prayer to heaven—not for himself now, but for the mother whom he dared not hope that he would ever meet again.

* * * * *

After leaving the house on Third Avenue where his interview with the two men, Finnegan and Mahon, had occurred, Paddy Hogan made the best of his way to No. — East — Street, the address he had heard given Finnegan by the stranger who had brought the summons from "Methuselah."

Remembering that Finnegan had been ordered to the place, he kept a close watch for him as he loitered about the premises.

In a few minutes he saw him coming in company with Mahon.

He immediately dodged around the corner and succeeded in escaping the observation of the two men.

Half an hour later he saw them leave the saloon.

When they were well out of sight he returned, and after a few moments' hesitation boldly entered the place.

There were half a dozen or more men standing at the bar, and all turned and stared critically at Paddy.

"Sure," muttered the Irishman, "ye're the worst lookin' lot I iver see!"

They did not hear him; but perhaps the expression of his face gave evidence of his feelings, for one of the fellows asked:

"What d'ye want, Paddy?"

"Sure," murmured the lad, "they know my name here, too. This is a great counthry!"

Aloud he said:

"I want a glass o' beer. Sure, what else wud I be wantin' here?"

They still continued to glare suspiciously upon him.

The place was a noted resort for criminals; few others ever entered it.

The unexpected appearance of a stranger at once gave rise to suspicion. Possibly the seeming Irish emigrant was a detective in disguise.

"Yer want beer, do yer?" said the barkeeper, as he drew a glass of an alleged malt beverage and placed it before our hero.

"I do," returned poor Paddy, somewhat uneasy at the close scrutiny of his companions.

"Well, ther yer have it. Drink it an' git out. We don't allow no loafin' round here."

Poor Paddy was in sad perplexity.

He had determined, with all an Irishman's enthusiasm, to save Ralph, and he stuck to the resolution with all an Irishman's pertinacity.

But he also had the caution which is a part of the Hibernian make-up, and knew that it would be madness to brave the wrath of the band of desperados by whom he was surrounded.

So he slowly drained his beer amidst dead silence, for the conversation which his entrance had interrupted was not resumed.

Then he suddenly asked a question that produced a startling effect upon his companions.

CHAPTER XVII.

"Alone You Cannot Save Him!"

"Do anny o' yez know a man by the name o' Methuselah?" he inquired.

Several of the men started as if they had been shot, and one of them sprang forward and seized the lad by the throat.

"Who are you, anyhow?" he shouted fiercely.

"Speak quick, or I'll choke the life out o' you."

"Let go der kid's t'roat," growled the barkeeper. "W'at's der matter wid yer?"

The fellow obeyed, demanding again with an oath:

"Who are you?"

"Sure I'm only Paddy Hogan," replied the boy. "I t'ought ye knew my name—ye called me by it."

"Der kid's all right," interposed the barkeeper again. "But"—addressing Paddy—"what do yer know about Methuselah, annyhow?"

Paddy set his wits to work to think up a reply that would not compromise him.

"Sure," he said, with an expression of innocent simplicity, "don't ivery wan in this neighborhood know him?"

"Do you live round here?"

"Sure I do—in the nixt strate. I was tould o' Methuselah, an' I t'ought I'd like to see him, so I did."

"Well, you git, an' stay away," advised the barkeeper. "If the old man knew you'd been round spyin' on him he'd have yer life. Skip!"

Paddy walked out without another word.

As a detective he did not seem to be a brilliant success.

"Sure," he muttered as he walked away, "I'm no match ag'in thim divils. I'll go to the perlice, so I will, an' that's what I ought to have done at first. But, oh, begorra, I'd like to find Masther Ralph, so I wud."

At this moment his attention was attracted by a little girl who stood upon the street corner, sobbing as if her heart would break.

It was the same girl who had enticed Ralph into the house on East ——— Street.

The Irish lad's sympathy was at once aroused.

"Sure, what's the matther, darlin'?" he asked.

The child looked up.

This time there were real tears in her eyes and upon her face.

She was not acting now.

"What's the matther?" repeated Paddy.

"Nothing," replied the girl, after a brief pause, during which she studied the sympathetic face of her companion.

"Nothin', is it? Thin, sure, I wudn't cry so much about it."

The boy turned to walk away.

Then he paused suddenly and asked:

"Do you live in these parts?"

"Yes, I do," was the quick response.

"An' do ye happen to know a man that goes by the quare name o' Methuselah?"

"I do, and I wish I didn't."

"Ye wish ye didn't?"

"That's what I said," sobbed the girl.

"An' why do ye wish ye didn't?"

"Because he's been so cruel to me that I'd almost as lief die as see him again. Indeed I believe I will die before I go back."

"Whist!" interrupted Paddy. "Don't be talking that a-way."

"I mean it. I'll go down to the river and throw myself in!"

"Ye'll do nothin' o' the sort if Paddy Hogan can prevint ye. Now, this Methuselah is a bad man, isn't he?"

The child shuddered.

"So bad that you can't have any idea of it."

"An' you live with him?"

"Yes; he says he is my grandfather, but I don't believe him."

"An' why don't ye?"

"Because I hate him, and I know I couldn't if he was really my grandfather; it wouldn't be natural."

The child was raised to a high pitch of excitement, or she would not have dared speak thus of

the man at whose very name many of the most hardened criminals in New York trembled.

But the events of the day had almost driven her to desperation.

For years she had begged and stolen at the bidding of her strange and cruel taskmaster; and, though her nature had rebelled at times, she had been forced to submit to the inevitable.

Never until this day had her whole nature seemed to rise in arms against the cruelty, the brutality, to which she had been subjected.

"It wudn't be natural—that's thrue," said Paddy, slowly. "An' what has he been doin' to ye ter-day—b'atin' ye?"

"Worse—worse!" sobbed the child; "but I can't, I dare not tell you."

"I'll not ask ye, thin," said Paddy. "But I wish ye had as good a masther as the wan I have an' am lookin' fer now. An', to tell ye the thruth, I belave he's in the power o' this ould blayguard of a grandfather o' yours."

The girl started.

"Who is he? Is he a young man, a boy?"

"Sure, he is."

"His name?"

"It's Ralph Earl."

The child uttered an exclamation, half of fear, half of joy.

"Ralph Earl!"

"Yes. In the name o' Hiven, tell me do ye know annyting about him? Have ye seen him?"

The girl hesitated.

And no wonder.

To speak might be to pronounce her own doom.

To betray the secrets of the lawless band to which her persecutor belonged, and in the power of which Ralph was, meant death—a fate from which she knew that, child though she was, she would not be exempt if her treachery to those who had so long held her in subjection were discovered.

But her hesitation was but for a moment.

"Yes," she said, "I do know something about him—I have seen him."

"Where is he?—tell me, quick!" shouted Patsy, in wild excitement.

"Hush!" interrupted the child, placing her fingers to her lips, while a look of shrewdness far beyond her years appeared upon and disfigured her sweet face. "Hush! He is in great danger."

"In danger?"

"Yes. He was lured to that house——"

"Whin?" interrupted Paddy, excitedly. "Who did it?"

"To-day, and by me."

"By you? Sure, ye're jokin'!"

"Do you think I'd joke about this? I took him to the house to see my sick grandfather—that's what I told him."

"Ye lied to him?" interposed the Irish lad, excitedly.

"Methuselah made me. But I didn't know that they meant to kill him."

"To kill him! Oh, wirra! wirra! an' is he dead now?"

"Oh, no—at least I think not. I listened at the door and overheard their awful plot, and—"

But the Irish lad could wait to hear no more.

"Misther Ralph in danger o' death! Begorra, thin, if they kill him they may kill me too; but perhaps I can save him."

And he started to run back to the saloon. But the child seized his arm and clung to it with all her strength.

"Wait! wait!" she almost shrieked.

"An' what'll I wait fer? Let go o' me!"

"I will not. You cannot save him."

"I'll thry to, annyway. Will ye take yer hands off o' me?"

"No. Listen; alone you cannot save him, but with my help perhaps you can."

"But—"

"If you do not listen to me you will surely be killed, and he will too; but if you will let me try to help you, maybe we can rescue him from that dreadful man."

"An' ye will help me?"

"Yes."

"Why?" asked Paddy, half suspiciously.

"Because he was so kind to me; because I liked his face."

"Sure, he's kind to iverywan; an' who can help likin' him? But come on an' we'll see if we can't get the best o' thim villains an' save my young masther's life."

And the strangely met pair started on an expedition that proved to be fraught with many perils.

CHAPTER XVIII.

Too Late?

On their way Paddy asked the girl:

"What's yer name?"

"I don't know," was the quick reply.

"Ye don't know?"

"No. There is a name that they call me by, but I don't believe it's really mine."

"And haven't ye a mother?"

"No."

"Nor a father?"

"No, I never had either—or, anyway, I can't remember 'em. Methuselah has been father and mother to me both, and pretty poor ones."

"He trates ye badly?"

"I should say he did."

"I should t'ink ye'd run away."

"I did once, but they caught me and brought me back. Then once I was taken by a society and sent to a home, but Methuselah kidnapped me and took me away. Oh, he's afraid of no one, but every one is afraid of him."

"Well, begorra, Paddy Hogan isn't," maintained the Irish lad stoutly.

"You've never seen him," shuddered the young girl.

"Sure, I don't t'ink the sight o' him would throuble me much. An Irishman is not aisy scared. Begorra, if he is mane enough to raise a hand agin a child like you, I'd like to give him a t'rashin' that he'd remember, old man an' all that he is."

But so great was the terror of the child at the terrible old man whose cruelty had shadowed and embittered her young life, that she shuddered at these words, exclaiming:

"Oh, you don't know him!"

"No, nor he don't know me."

"I shall never dare go back again after what I am going to do to-day; they would kill me."

"Ye naden't go back. I know a leddy—bless her kind heart—that'll gladly take ye and care for ye for the rist o' yer loife."

"You do?" cried the girl eagerly. "Who is she?"

"Masther Ralph's mother. Don't ye t'ink that if ye save her son's life she'll do anyting in the world for ye?"

"But Methuselah might find me and drag me back—oh, he would, I know he would!"

"Beggorra, he wudn't, thin, if there's anny law in Ameriky, as I've been tould there is. But where's this you're takin' me to?"

"To the pit."

"The which?"

"A place they call the pit; it's where they've put your master."

"Oh, murther! An' what sort av a place is it?"

"It's a deep well. They turn on water and fill it up, and if any one's in it he drowns."

Paddy uttered a horrified exclamation.

"An' Masther Ralph's in it?"

"Yes."

"Oh, the murtherin' villains! Sure, hadn't we better tell the perlice at wanst?"

"No, no—there is not time, and they could not do it. Only I can save him, and I must do it at the risk of my life."

"Sure, darlin', your life shall not be sacrificed while Paddy Hogan draws breath. But what are ye sthoppin' her for?"

For the child had paused at the entrance to a long, dark alleyway immediately at the rear of the house on East — street.

"This is the back entrance to the place," she said. "If we'd gone in the other way we never could have got there at all. Come!"

Paddy followed her.

He was a brave lad, as most Irish lads are, but he could not suppress a feeling of apprehension at the thought of the dangers into which he was undeniably rushing.

He was about to enter the headquarters of the most desperate band of criminals in New York,

men who would not hold his life worth a moment's purchase if they detected him in his attempt to rescue their victim.

To enter a den of vipers unarmed would have been scarcely more dangerous.

When they emerged from the alleyway they found themselves in a small, dingy courtyard.

"Now comes the hardest part of all," whispered the girl.

"An' what's that?" queried Paddy.

"To steal the keys."

"The keys?"

"Yes, the keys to the cellar."

"An' where are they?"

"In my grandfather's room."

"If he should be there——"

"Well, whatever happens," said the child, whose face was deathly pale, "I'll do my best."

"Sure, I belave that. But can't I stale the keys?"

"No, no. Go down those stairs and wait for me."

She pointed to a flight of stone steps that led to the cellar.

Paddy obeyed, and his companion stole noiselessly into the house.

The time that elapsed before her return seemed to the excited Irish boy an hour, but it was scarcely five minutes.

At last she came.

With rapid, noiseless steps she descended to the cellar door.

"Have you got 'em?" whispered Paddy.

"Yes. Just as I left the room with them in my pocket he came in. But he didn't ask any questions, and I hurried out. Now we mustn't lose another moment."

As she spoke she unlocked the door, and motioned to Paddy to enter the cellar.

The boy obeyed.

The subterranean apartment was damp and dark, and pervaded by a death-like odor.

Its size surprised the Irish lad—it evidently extended under several adjoining buildings.

"We may be too late," murmured the girl, in tremulous accents.

"Too late!" echoed Paddy, fearfully.

"Yes, for it is a long time since they put him there. After a body's been there long enough they open a gate, and it goes down into the river; and when it's found the coroner says it was a case of 'Accidental drowning.'"

"The saints presarve us!" cried the Irish boy, to whom the story of such horrors seemed almost incredible.

"But I don't believe, I won't believe," cried the strange child, with new energy, "that it's too late. While I was at the Home the good ladies taught me that there was One above who is always watching over good people, and taking care of them; and if that is true, I am sure He must have sent you to me so that I could save the life of your young master."

"I belave ye're right," said the Irish boy, devoutly.

The girl now paused before a large iron door.

"What's this?" asked Paddy.

His companion was now trembling from head to foot.

She could scarcely speak.

"He's in here!" she whispered hoarsely, pointing to the door.

She attempted to unlock it, but her strength failed her.

Paddy seized the key and inserted it in the lock.

The massive door turned heavily on its hinges.

A room about forty feet square was revealed; in its centre an iron grating.

"He's there if he's alive," whispered the girl. "But I don't hear a sound. I'm afraid—yes, it must be that we are too late."

At this instant a faint but thrilling cry arose upon the air.

"Help!"

The voice was weak and muffled, but it was unmistakably that of Ralph Earl.

"It's him, it's him!" almost shrieked the girl. "Pull up the grating—lower the rope ladder—quick!"

As she uttered the last words she sank fainting at our hero's feet.

"Help!" again came from the murky depths below.

"I'm here, Masther Ralph!" cried the Irish lad. "Hould on a minute an' I'll save ye!"

A mass of rope lay in a confused heap at his feet. A moment's examination showed that it was the rope ladder spoken of by the girl, and that the upper part of it was securely fastened to two iron rings in the floor.

It was but the work of a moment to cast the ladder into the pit.

Then Paddy asked:

"Have ye got it, Masther Ralph? Can ye climb up?"

A few moments of terrible suspense followed.

Ralph did not immediately reply.

Could it be that his strength had become exhausted, and that his would-be assassins had accomplished their foul purpose?

This was the question that Paddy Hogan asked himself.

"Masther Ralph," cried the Irish boy again, "spake to me! Can't ye climb the rope?"

"I'll try," came in faint accents from below. "I'm very tired and weak, but it's my last chance."

Then ensued another brief period of silence.

Brief, did we say? It seemed a lifetime to Paddy.

The Irish boy could not see down into the pit, but the movement of the rope ladder showed him that Ralph was ascending.

At last a hand was extended in mute appeal.

Paddy seized it, and in another minute had dragged Ralph from his living tomb.

The boy sank, panting and breathless, to the floor.

Paddy bent over him in an agony of suspense.

"Sure, Masther Ralph," he cried, "say ye're not kilt intirely!"

Ralph smiled faintly.

"I'm all right, Paddy."

"Are ye sure?"

"Yes; but it was a close call. In another minute I should have had to give up."

"The saints be praised! we've saved ye."

"We?"

"Me an' that bit uv a girl yonder; an', be-gorra, I dunno but she's dead intirely."

Ralph looked in the direction in which Paddy pointed and saw the prostrate body of the child.

"Why," he exclaimed, "it's the girl who enticed me to this place!"

"Thru enough," said Paddy, "an' the wan who helped me save ye. Indade, if she hadn't, I cud niver have done what I have."

"Is that true, Paddy?"

"Indade, an' it is. But, sure, this is no time for talkin'; I'll tell ye the whole story as soon as we're well out o' this, sorr. As soon as ye're able, we'll leave this place."

Ralph arose slowly.

"I feel better now," he said, "and we can go. It all seems like a dream; but, as you say, explanations can be better made later. But this poor girl——"

"Sure, we can't lave her here."

"Of course not, Paddy."

"I've made her a promise, sorr."

"A promise?"

"Yis. It was she that saved yer loife, an' I've promised her that yer mother wud care for her an' give her a home."

"You were right, Paddy," said Ralph, grasping his companion's hand. "My mother will, indeed, see that your promise is kept, nor will you be forgotten."

"Sure, Masther Ralph——"

"Hark!"

This exclamation was prompted by the sound of footsteps outside the iron door.

"Sure, we're lost!" gasped Paddy. "Some o' thim murderin' villains is comin'!"

Ralph enjoined silence by a gesture.

Then, seizing the inanimate form of the girl

in his arms, he bore it to the farthest corner of the room, motioning Paddy to follow him.

There, enshrouded by the darkness, they awaited the arrival of their enemies.

Seemingly detection was almost certain.

The doors were open, the rope ladder was in the pit.

Both Ralph and Paddy quickly made up their minds that if they regained their liberty they would have to fight for it.

Scarcely had they gained their place of partial concealment when two burly fellows entered the room.

Paddy recognized them as two of the ruffians he had seen in the barroom.

"Yes," said one of them, "Methuselah has been here ahead of us. I thought so when I seen the doors open, an' the rope ladder proves it."

"But it ain't like him ter leave them doors unlocked," objected the other.

"Oh, the old man's failin'," was the response.

"He ain't what he used ter be, Methuselah ain't."

"Better not let him hear you say that."

"Well, it's so. Now, then, you go up an' get the keys, an' I'll wait here."

"All right," and the fellow left the place.

It was a critical moment for Ralph and his companions.

To remain meant certain detection, yet escape seemed almost impossible.

Paddy solved the difficulty.

Scarcely had the ruffian's footsteps died away in the distance when he sprang forward and dealt the fellow who remained a crushing blow upon the right temple.

So sudden was the attack that the man had not time even to utter a cry.

He dropped to the floor like a log and lay motionless.

Then Paddy took the girl from Ralph's arms, saying:

"Don't let us lose a moment, Masther Ralph. If that blayguard comes back an' finds us here it'll be the ind of us."

And he started at a quick pace for the door, followed by his companion.

The continuation of Paddy's adventures will be found in the companion story to this, entitled, "PADDY'S TRIUMPH; OR, THE WILD IRISH BOY'S VICTORY," which will be published in No. 16 of The Up-to-Date Boys' Library, out week after next.

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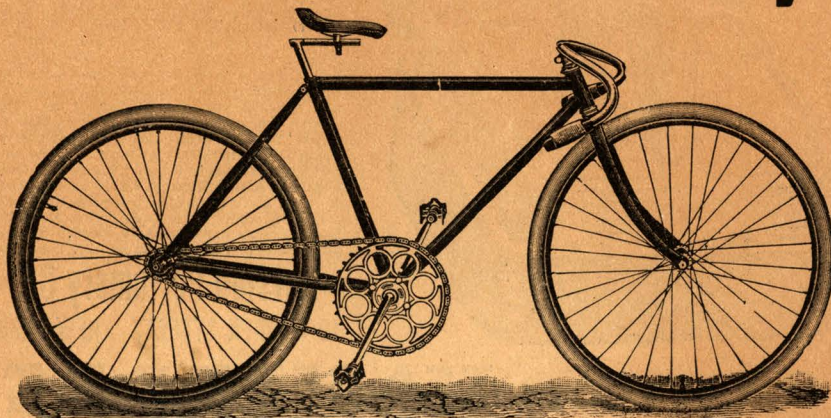
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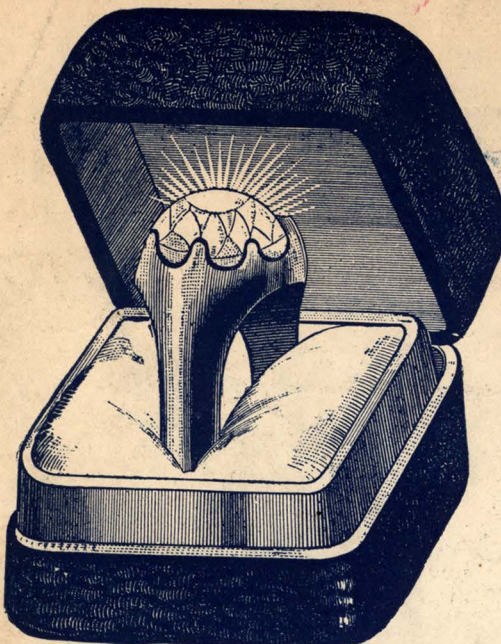
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